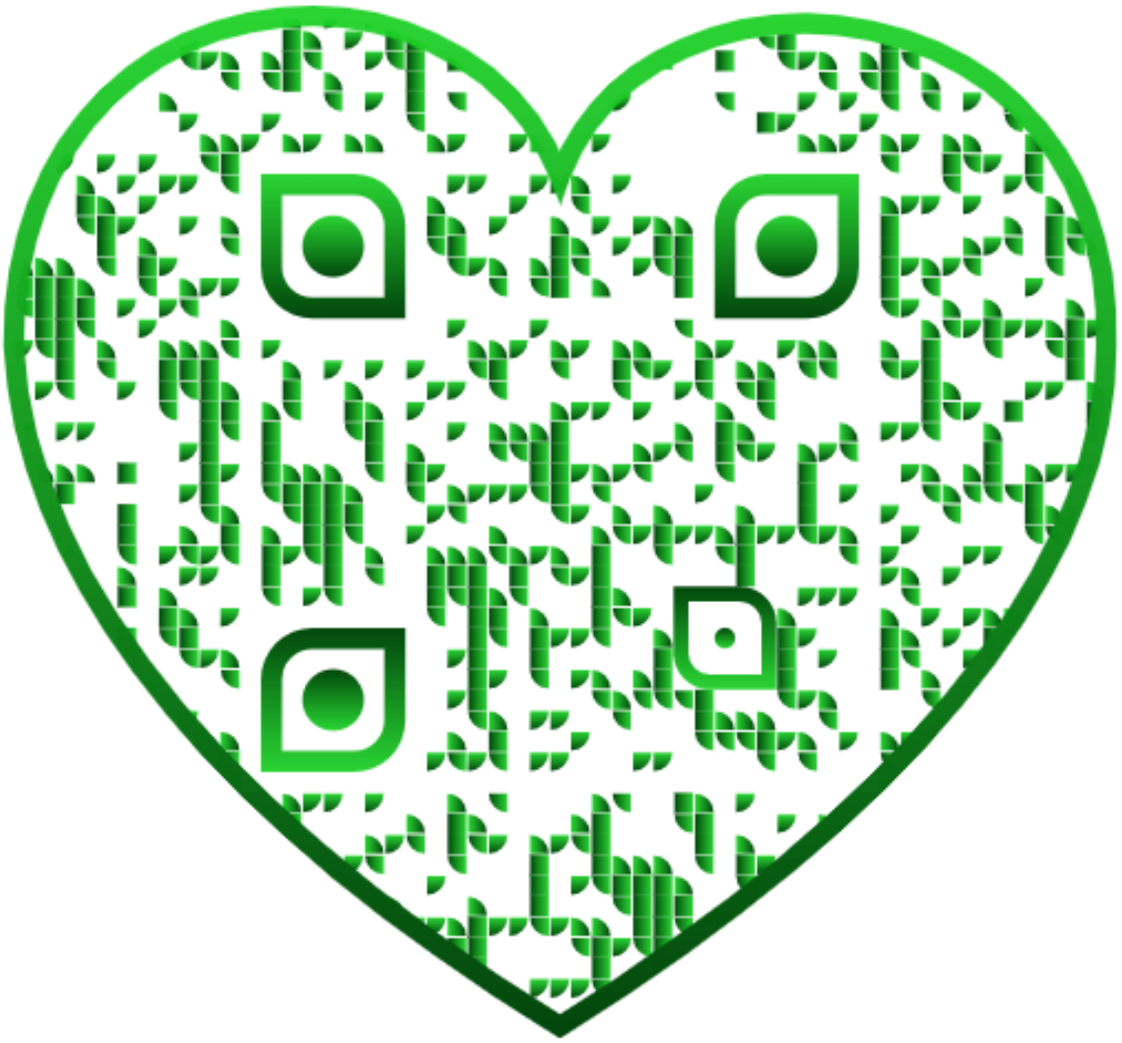
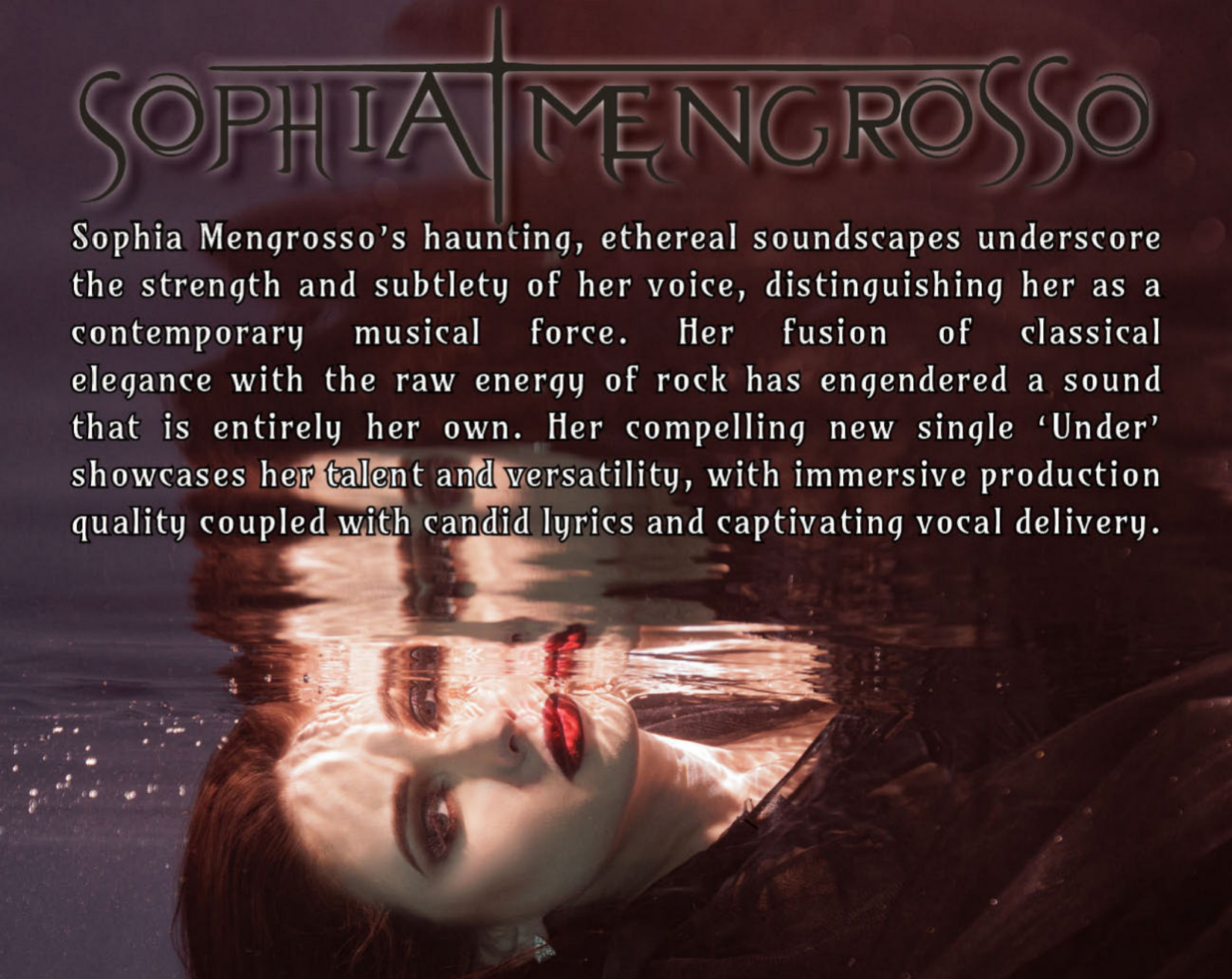
METAL HAMMER
KANSAS
22
SLAYER
"THEY DROVE A TRUCK THROUGH THE SCENE!"
SHOW NO MERCY, HELL AWAITS, AND THE BIRTH OF A LEGEND
FUTURE
ISSUE 386
"I'm not a nice guy. I'm a weirdo, uncomfortable in my own skin"
TOOL
METAL'S MOST MYSTERIOUS BAND OPEN UP
AVENGED SEVENFOLD
Giant Deathbats! Flaming walls! A7X go VR
VOLBEAT
Michael Poulsen on tape-trading, Elvis... and breakdancing?
KITTIE
Inside the year's biggest nu metal comeback
DOOM
How one iconic game transformed metal



SOPHIA MENGROSSO

Sophia Mengrosso's haunting, ethereal soundscapes underscore the strength and subtlety of her voice, distinguishing her as a contemporary musical force. Her fusion of classical elegance with the raw energy of rock has engendered a sound that is entirely her own. Her compelling new single 'Under' showcases her talent and versatility, with immersive production quality coupled with candid lyrics and captivating vocal delivery.



Sophia's upcoming album 'Unforgiven' will further explore the emotional depths she has so skillfully crafted. Her live shows and festival appearances are always highly anticipated, offering audiences a chance to fully engage with her unique musical narrative.

sophia_mengrosso

UNDER out now

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METAL HAMMER

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ARTISTS ARE PEOPLE TOO!

IF YOU KNOW Tool, you'll know that their fandom can be cult-like – as well as critical. People have spent *hours* poring over the meaning of their lyrics, as well as hours on social media, speculating about their timescale for making new music and the dynamic between the bandmembers. We set all that chatter aside, and went to LA for a rare and exclusive audience with frontman Maynard James Keenan and guitarist Adam Jones, ahead of their UK tour in May.

What we found were two people who are very human (sorry, Tool obsessives/conspiracists), and very self aware. Two people who are as comfortable talking about Tool's clashing egos, disparate personalities and ongoing creative tensions as they are about messaging each other stupid memes and the perils of getting wig hair caught in your mouth when you're trying to sing (see: Maynard's outings with A Perfect Circle).

Being in Tool doesn't sound easy, but, as Adam himself says, they don't take themselves too seriously. And despite the arguments and gaps between albums, it's clear they still find the band immensely rewarding. As do we.

Stay metal,

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR
@ELEANORGOODMAN

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MEET THE BAND

STEVE APPLEFORD
WRITER
Steve is an LA music journalist who's also written for *Rolling Stone*, *Revolver* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Although he's had a handful of encounters with Tool, this was his first time speaking to the elusive Maynard and Adam – read the results on p.34.

KRISTIN BURNS
PHOTOGRAPHER
A long-time collaborator with Tool, who's shot for the band's tour books, the excellent Kristin handled our cover feature this month. She's also worked with the legendary likes of The Smashing Pumpkins, Stevie Nicks and Duran Duran.

SERENA CHERRY
WRITER
Who better to delve into the Most Metal Videogames than Serena, a self-proclaimed "Metal Gaming Rollercoaster nerd"? She enjoys playing RPGs while listening to metal bands singing about dragons. And swords. And goblins. And elves. And castles. And wizards.

34 TOOL

10 CHELSEA WOLFE

14 MIKE SHINODA

CONT

FRONT ROW

8 From giant Deathbats to walls of fire, step inside **AVENGED SEVENFOLD**'s first ever VR gig.
10 We put your burning questions to witchy singer **CHELSEA WOLFE**.
14 The tracks that shaped Linkin Park legend **MIKE SHINODA**.
15 In the studio with Griffin Taylor and Simon Crahan of **VENDED**.
16 Get your life lessons from Volbeat/Asinhell's **MICHAEL POULSEN**.
20 The story behind *Milquetoast*, **HELMET**'s biggest hit.
24 Say hello to rising nu gen star and 'brat punk' **DELILAH BON**.

FEATURES

34 We head to LA for an exclusive audience with **TOOL**.
42 Meet **THE NEXT GENERATION** of bands inspired by Maynard and co.
48 Following **SLAYER**'s surprise resurrection for festival season, we revisit the birth of a legend.
54 Why the nu metal resurgence helped bring back **KITTIE**.
60 Texas death metallers **FROZEN SOUL** might write cold anthems, but they've got warm hearts.
64 How **DOOL** vocalist Raven van Dorst is on a mission to change attitudes and minds.

60 FROZEN SOUL

84 KORPIKLAANI

48 SLAYER

54 KITTIE

ENTS

SUBSCRIBE NOW & SAVE
Head to p.32 for details

71 Three decades ago, **DOOM** revolutionised gaming and metal – and its legacy lives on.
76 We uncover **THE 20 MOST METAL VIDEOGAMES EVER**.

ALBUMS

84 KORPIKLAANI raise their tankards – and their game.
87 Death metal devilry from Florida legends **DEICIDE**.
90 DVNE make their case for being post-metal's new messiah.
91 ERRA leap up the metalcore ranks.
93 HIGH ON FIRE return with all guns blazing.
95 MY DYING BRIDE wring more glory from their gloom.

LIVES

96 IHSAHN and **TRIBULATION** bring glories to **CELESTIAL DARKNESS**.
99 Alt hardcore heroes **THRICE** revisit a classic.
100 TESSERACT bring all kinds of dazzle to Birmingham.
101 FROZEN SOUL ride death metal's new wave into Camden.
102 Metalcore hi-risers **POLARIS** face a test at The Forum.
103 Pop/metal idol **POPPY** offers up an extra-terrestrial experience.

96 IHSAHN

64 DOOL

PRESS/LARRY HORRICKS © 2022 YELLOW FLOWER LLC.

THE BIG PICTURE

STONE THE CROWS

ACTOR BILL SKARSGÅRD appears as Eric Draven, in an image from the upcoming remake of 1994 cult classic *The Crow*. Based on a 1989 comic of the same title by James O'Barr, the original movie starred Brandon Lee as Eric, but he tragically died on set in an accident involving a prop gun. The film became a sleeper hit and inspired three sequels, in part thanks to its distinctive industrial-goth aesthetic and a soundtrack that featured artists including Nine Inch Nails, Helmet, The Cure and My Life With The Thrill Kill Kult, the latter even performing on-screen.

The Crow remake has been in development since at least 2008, with actors including Jason Momoa and Bradley Cooper attached to the lead role at various points during the movie's pre-production. Ultimately, the part of murdered musician/avenging vigilante Eric Draven went to *It/Clark* star Bill Skarsgård, and the first images show his distinctive look, which trades out the leather and facepaint of Brandon Lee's original portrayal for tattoos and heavy eyeliner. Directed by Rupert Sanders (*Ghost In The Shell*), the movie is due for release on June 7. H

THE HOT TOPIC

A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN

Avenged Sevenfold launch their first-ever VR gig – featuring flowers, walls of fire and giant Deathbats!

WORDS: STEVE APPLEFORD

AVENGED SEVENFOLD CONTINUE to proselytise for a high-tech future, wherever it leads. And on February 27, they hosted a private launch party in the basement of a Los Angeles office tower to share their first virtual reality experience, Avenged Sevenfold VR Concert: Looking Inside.

A small crowd of journalists and fans dined on empanadas and A7X-brand IPA brew, then took turns experiencing the immersive, 3D concert on Apple Vision Pro and Meta Quest VR headsets, plugging into a surreal, 26-minute performance of songs from the band's latest album, *Life Is But A Dream...*: *Nobody, (D)eath* and *Mattel* – plus the hits *Hail To The King* and *Nightmare*. The show unfolds in a mind-expanding virtual world built by Unreal Engine 5, delivered exclusively by the AmazeVR Concerts App.

The band shot their performance on a green screen stage last year in Los Angeles, with their epic surroundings, special effects and the drawings of album cover artist Wes Lang digitally added later. A7X are seen performing amid walls of fire, strange landscapes and a massive Deathbat brought to life.

"I sat there with, like, a shit-eating grin on my face the whole time, just totally immersed in it," singer M. Shadows told *Hammer* of his first time watching the final version of the concert.

Viewers will be transported into a new digital dimension, and can turn their heads to watch any band-member in action: Shadows, guitarists Synyster Gates and Zacky Vengeance, bassist Johnny Christ, and drummer Brooks Wackerman.

The first song is *Mattel*, and it sets a visual tone with Shadows sitting in a ski mask surrounded by flowers, mixed with shots of the band in performance, as the camera moves in and out, sometimes almost uncomfortably close to the face of Shadows. Johnny Christ says he hasn't seen the singer's face that close up since their early days travelling to gigs in a crowded van.

The decision to focus the VR concert mostly on *Life Is But A Dream...* was an easy one, says Shadows, as the band continue their season of wild experimentation, stepping further away from traditional heavy music to create their most psychedelic set of songs.

"We're obviously promoting a new record, and that's where our headspace is at," Shadows adds. "It's what we're really proud of. And it's where visually and creatively we're gonna be able to really say: this is what we're thinking now."

As a song, *Mattel* was years in the making before the album release, but then landed coincidentally just before the worldwide box office sensation *Barbie*, starring Margot Robbie as the living doll. The band's music video was an alarming animation of tortured Barbies made with the people behind *Robot Chicken*. That makes Looking Inside the first official on-camera presentation of A7X performing the song.

"It's a theatrical song to begin with, and it lends itself to a lot of visualisers. That's what we've done on our live show, too," says Johnny. "That song paints its own picture in a lot of ways, and it lends itself very well to something like this, where you can give an immersive experience on it."

"IT'S LIKE A CONCERT INSIDE A VIDEOGAME WITH A BROADWAY PRODUCTION"

M. SHADOWS

Headsets at the ready!

PRESS

Q&A time! The band reveal all

Lime light: A7X on the green screen stage

AmazeVR is a South Korean tech company that in 2022 released a high-profile four-song VR concert performance by US rapper Megan Thee Stallion. For the A7X project – the company's first collaboration with a rock act – the band found a creative partner in filmmaker Lance Drake, creative director at AmazeVR, and the hands-on director of Looking Inside.

"He had a vision for it, which is why you want a great director. You want someone that's gonna blow you away," says Shadows. "He's a badass."

For his part, Lance pushed to include the shimmering *(D)eath* on the setlist, and he depicts bandmembers in a weird purgatory of folding chairs lined up in a drab minimalist waiting room, as Shadows croons in the Sinatra tradition.

"The song *(D)eath* really spoke to me, because it is such a strange song," says Lance, calling it a "micro universe" representing the band's current mood of shattering expectations.

"That song felt like lounge music in the afterlife," he explains. "It was the seed of this idea – that death is a waiting room to go to the other side. I imagined this song playing on crappy speakers in a doctor's office, this crooning music, this feeling."

The final result is what Shadows calls "almost like a concert inside a videogame with a Broadway production", and it's likely only the beginning for a band grappling with the possibilities of Virtual Reality. It will take some time for the natural audience for Looking Inside to catch up; while the concert download is as affordable as a digital album, the headsets remain pricey, with the Apple Vision Pro starting at about $3,500 (UK launch price tba), and the Meta Quest VR starting at a more reasonable £450.

"After this jumping-off point, there's so much more we can do," says Johnny Christ. "That's the exciting part about being one of the first artists to do it – we've done it, and now we can see where we can go with it."

DOWNLOAD *LOOKING INSIDE* AT AMAZEVR.COM/ARTISTS/AVENGEDSEVENFOLD

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

BORKNAGAR
Fall
"BRB, just off to go and live in nature"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

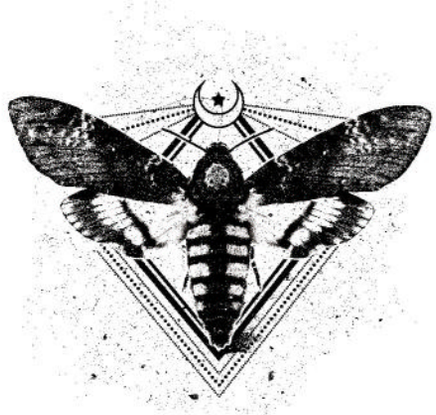
DOOL
The Shape Of Fluidity
"A transformative rite of passage bathed in splendour and massive tunes"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

GUN
Hombres
"Gun always deliver but *Hombres* is some of their best stuff in years"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

JUDAS PRIEST
Invincible Shield
"PRRRRIIIIEST!"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

COUCH SLUT
You Could Do It Tonight
"Stomach-churning sludgy noise you can wear like a blanket"
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

UNCLE ACID AND THE DEADBEATS
Nell' Ora Blu
"The soundtrack to the greatest 70s Italian horror movie never made"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



WOULD YOU FRONT TYPE O NEGATIVE?

Chelsea Wolfe answers your questions on Peter Steele, reincarnation, and whether she prefers llamas or donkeys

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT • PICTURES: STEPHANIE CABRAL

ACROSS HER SEVEN albums, singer-songwriter Chelsea Wolfe has drawn on everything from brooding doom to whimsical electronica, each release summoning its own particular kind of dark magic. Her unblemished repertoire also includes 2021's Converge collaboration, *Bloodmoon: I*, and the score for 2022 slasher movie *X* (alongside composer Tyler Bates and her longterm musical partner, Ben Chisholm). To mark the release of Chelsea's latest album, *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She*, we asked her your burning questions.

Will we ever get a *Bloodmoon* vol. 2?
Bryan Hughes, Facebook
"Definitely. I'm not positive if I'll be part of it, but there are plans to make *Bloodmoon 2*... I just don't know when."

If you could have a soundtrack for every time you walked in a room, what song would play?
Joel Hart, email
"Anything by [Texan rock band] True Widow, probably."

Would you front Type O Negative if the members ever wanted a reunion?
Kevin Pope, Facebook
"As long as they're cool people! I don't know anything about them as human beings. Obviously the music is amazing, so that'd be fun. I dressed up as Peter Steele for Halloween once, so I think he and I have a similar 'giant person' vibe, because I'm kind of a giant."

If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
Matt Turner, email
"A house cat. I'm a hermit and I like to cosy up somewhere and read a book, so that seems kind of house catty."

What's your favourite horror film?
Sophie Farhana, email
"I really love *Thirst* by Park Chan-wook. He's just such a brilliant director. It's kind of romantic while also being heavy and dark; it's focused on the reality of being a vampire. Some of the shots are so beautiful. The cinematography is magical. There's also all these really subtle, almost ASMR feelings of the way that the characters are filmed."

***Hammer*: When you worked on *X*, did you watch the film while writing the soundtrack?**
"To be honest, I don't like horror that's typically gory, so it was difficult for me to watch some of those scenes over and over, especially the stabby ones! But it was also a really interesting process to be able to write sounds and vocal parts to a picture, so it was good and bad."

Do you have any personal rituals before going onstage?
Rotting_Magg, Instagram
"I like to have some alone time, create a little space for myself, light some candles and incense, with tarot cards and meditation – just little simple rituals to bring me back to myself and ready to share the music onstage."

You've previously spoken about how witchcraft is an important part of your life. Do you use the craft to inform any of your performances or songwriting techniques?
charlottesometimes.x, Instagram
"Similarly to my pre-show rituals, I like to create a container, as we say a lot in witchcraft; setting the space, setting a time that you're going to work on something. Pulling a tarot card for guidance. More and more over the years I've very intentionally set space to make it very clear to myself that I'm about to do something special."

Do you have any favourite witches?
Bella Davies, Facebook
"Anyone who writes a book on witchcraft that I love, like Starhawk. A lot of my friends are witchy writers. People like Pam Grossman, Sarah Faith Gottesdiener – who wrote *The Moon Book* – and Britten LaRue, who's an astrologer and mystic. There's just so many wonderful women – you can go into my Instagram and find some of the wonderful witches that I follow. I think of them as teachers from afar."

What made you cover *Misty Mountains* from *The Hobbit* on TikTok?
Elizabeth Heather, email
"My cat passed away last April, so my way of dealing with it was to rewatch all *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Hobbit* movies as a kind of comfort thing. There was a particularly foggy misty morning up in the mountains where ▶

“IT WAS HARD FOR ME TO WATCH SOME OF THE STABBY SCENES!”

Chelsea might have scored *X*, but she can’t handle gore

Chelsea: a *LOTR* stan

I live and I just decided to go out there and record that one. I sang it probably 10 times. I was trying to sing it really well, and then all of a sudden I stopped, and decided to make it feel as though I was really in the Tolkien universe, standing in front of a group of people in a tavern or something, as dorky as it sounds, and singing the song with my whole heart. It just so happened that take was when the fog rolled in right behind me, it was kind of perfect."

***Hammer*: Would you ever think about doing more renditions from the Tolkien universe?**
"I would definitely cover something else from the Tolkien world as well – there's so many good songs."

Donkeys or llamas?
Matt D'Antonio, Facebook
"I love all animals. Both – one of each."

Love how you've started posting fashion-related content. What inspires the way you dress?
Lily Reed, Facebook
"I'm obviously drawn a little bit more to the fantastical realm… my fashion sense has the tiniest hint of cosplayer. Some days I feel like dressing like a hobbit or other days like a wizard."

If you could be reincarnated, what would you choose to become?
Andy Toll, email
"I always think about how wonderfully freeing it must feel to be a dancer or a painter. I think something that's maybe more physical. Because I'm a singer, and I enjoy slow movement and things like yoga and stuff, but I've never been super-athletic. I think it would feel really good to be someone who has that in their body. I think painting is something that I will do more of in this lifetime."

Is there anything in particular that inspires the very dark and mystical quality to your music videos?
Dave Bolan, email
"Most of the imagery of this album, and the art surrounding it, has been hugely inspired by an 80s animated film called *Angel's Egg*. It's this sort of mysterious, post-apocalyptic world, and there's this girl who's protecting a giant egg. You don't really know what's inside the egg, but you can tell that whatever it is, it's important and it holds a lot of hope for the future. The egg became a strong symbol for me as someone who was making a lot of changes in my life and stepping away from the old and into the new."

"SOME DAYS I FEEL LIKE DRESSING LIKE A HOBBIT, OTHER DAYS A WIZARD"

***Hammer*: How so?**
"I felt like I was holding this egg full of possibilities, and I didn't know what the future was going to hold – I left my old record label and management company, got sober, and made other changes in my life. The most recent visualiser for [*She Reaches Out To…* track] *Everything Turns Blue* is focused inside of the egg, the shadow and light elements."

What are you watching on TV?
Annie Horton, email
"I just finished Brit Marling's new show, *A Murder at The End Of The World*, so now I'm rewatching [her earlier series] *The OA*. It's really nice to see it again. I'm such a subtle fan of sci-fi in books, television shows and movies, where you're finding the extraordinary in the ordinary."

Which season would you be and why?
Dorian Flowers, email
"I've always thought of myself as a winter person, and I do love the quiet when it snows and sort of that magic, but I'm finding myself really drawn to spring now."

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?
Matthew Bridges, Facebook
"That human beings are created with more patience and kindness."

If you weren't a musician, what would you be doing instead?
Malcolm Davidson, Facebook
"When I was in my early 20s, I worked at a cafe, and I would go in at 4:30am and bake all of the muffins and things for the day. I don't know if I'm good at baking, but I like the peace and quiet of being up that early, and being the only one there before the world gets started."

What is your favourite thing about nature?
Jade Sutton, email
"I really like the cyclical elements of it, how you always know that this isn't forever. I like knowing every year that there's going to be those cycles, and the cycles of the moon every month, going from old to new and back again. I find such a comfort in that, and if you ever feel lost, you can look to the cycles of nature as a guide to get out of that lostness and find your way again."

***SHE REACHES OUT TO SHE REACHES OUT TO SHE* IS OUT NOW VIA LOMA VISTA. CHELSEA WOLFE PLAYS HEAVEN IN LONDON ON APRIL 21 AND TOURS THE UK FROM OCTOBER 26**

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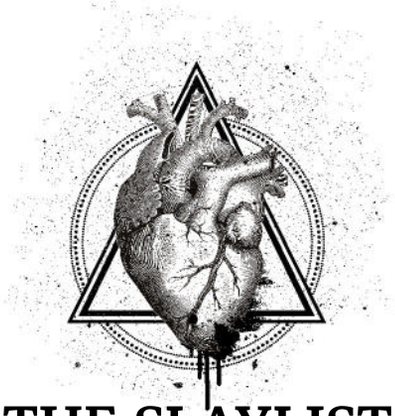


THE SLAYLIST

MIKE SHINODA

The Linkin Park legend talks 80s pop, trance, and how Anthrax and Public Enemy showed him the way

WORDS: PAUL BRANNIGAN • PICTURES: MIKE MILLER

Mike throws a few surprises into the mix. Who saw Tears For Fears coming?!

"EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT I love **PUBLIC ENEMY**. The first show I ever went to was Anthrax with Public Enemy, a rap-rock show, which is kinda funny considering that rap-rock is what I ended up doing. A cool first show to go to, right? Less cool that I went with my dad as my chaperone! *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* is an amazing album – so aggressive and abrasive and political, but also funny, and *Rebel Without A Pause* was a great intro point.

"I collected everything **NINE INCH NAILS** put out – all the CDs, all the singles, all the remixes, but *The Perfect Drug* from the *Lost Highway* soundtrack felt like this wild leap forward for Trent Reznor, or at least it broke my expectations about what Nine Inch Nails were doing. It has this drum'n'bass/jungle kind of beat, but then that hypnotic, almost psychedelic outro, and it was really influential in encouraging some of the experimentation we tried in Linkin Park.

"**BEASTIE BOYS**' *Check Your Head* was so shocking when it came out, because they brought their punk rock roots into hip hop in a way that was so unexpected and irreverent and exciting. I'd loved *Licensed To Ill*, but then kinda drifted away when they put out *Paul's Boutique* because there was so much other cool stuff going on in hip hop at the time, but *So What'cha Want* pulled me right back in.

"**DR. DRE** is another artist where I collected everything he was doing. *Deep Cover* was the first time I heard Snoop Dogg, this new superstar, and it felt like horror movie music, so dark and aggressive and dangerous.

"Speaking of aggressive, let's have *Killing In The Name*, by **RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE**. I didn't like much rock at the time – grunge didn't speak to me like hip hop did – but *Killing In The Name* changed my mind. The things Tom Morello was doing with his guitar were amazing – taking influences from funk and hip hop and making them super-heavy – and Zack [de la Rocha] was a phenomenon. I couldn't even process what was happening with that group, it was just so good.

"OK, let's switch it up: my favourite song from the 80s is **TEARS FOR FEARS**' *Everybody Wants To Rule The World*. I love that song. Anytime someone references it you can tell instantly, because it's such a unique song that you can't get close to it without giving away that's what you're doing. I also love *Enjoy The Silence* by **DEPECHE MODE**. I used to drive my brother and our neighbour to school, and they both loved Depeche Mode – they'd always try to play it in my car, and I'd be saying, 'Turn that shit off, put on A Tribe Called Quest!' Then later I got a chance to remix Depeche Mode, and my brother was like, 'How dare you? That was my favourite band, and now you're a big fan? You're an asshole!' But Depeche Mode are great, and the way they arranged this song was very unique. A lot of their songs unfold in a way that's unconventional and unexpected.

"Also, if we're talking unexpected… *Come To Daddy* by **APHEX TWIN**. Such a good song, it's crazy. The idea of using a computer to rip apart sounds and make a song? Wow. It completely revolutionised the way that I approached making music, and you can hear my Apex Twin homages – all the glitchy, stuttering audio – all over *Hybrid Theory*.

"Staying in England, *Biscuit* by **PORTISHEAD**. It's one of the coolest tracks I've ever heard, like how do you even make a track that sounds like this? When I hear this song I just go, 'Yeah, it's just magic.' I fucking love that beat, and the vocals… wow, just so great.

"Let's end with a really weird one: *Guns Blazing (Drums Of Death Part 1)* by **UNKLE**. This is the opening track on *Psyence Fiction*, and it's DJ Shadow and James Lavelle, with Kool G Rap, a rapper who's been around since the 80s. This track is awesome, it's effectively like a rap song, but really dark, and there's something very alternative about how they approached it." H

LISTEN NOW
To hear Mike's choices, head to tinyurl.com/ShinodaSlaylist

"GRUNGE DIDN'T SPEAK TO ME LIKE HIP HOP DID"

MIKE SHINODA'S *THE CRIMSON CHAPTER* IS OUT NOW VIA FORT MINOR

PRESS/MIKE MILLER

IN THE STUDIO

VENDED

Iowan upstarts prepare to step out from their famous dads' shadows

WORDS: ALEX DELLER

Vended are determined to make it on their own merits

DESPITE BRIMMING OVER with youthful piss and vinegar, Vended have had the maturity to hone their craft and make sure they deliver a kick-ass debut album. Now, six years on from their formation and almost three since they released their debut EP, *What Is It// Kill It*, they're almost ready to unleash their own brand of maniacal music unto the world. We sat down with vocalist Griffin Taylor and drummer Simon Crahan to talk discipline, dick punches and whether their dads in Slipknot had any advice when it came to releasing a killer debut…

This is your first album after an EP and a few singles – did you have to get in a different headspace to deliver it?
Simon: "Our EP was like a mini-Lego set, but the album was like one of those giant fucking castles that takes 30 hours to complete. We did the EP at my home. It was comfortable – I could take a nap if I wanted. For the album we were in a sketchy part of California. It was like, 'Don't go outside, you might get shot.'"

What was the vibe like in the studio?
Simon: "I'd say 'brotherhood' is the best way to explain it. We were all very connected, very into each other's lives and it just felt right."

It seems like Vended are more a military outfit than a group of lads dicking around…
Simon: "We want this to be our lives. You can have fun onstage, but there's no fucking about in the studio. If you want to release something good, you take it seriously. We're at the lowest point on the food chain, so we have to take it seriously in order to get to the top."
Griffin: "We're young, hungry, and we want to punch people in the balls. It's pretty much, 'Listen, motherfucker, you may think you know us, but we're gonna drag you into our world and show you what the fuck is up.'"

What's gone into the record, beyond the desire to punch us in the nuts?
Griffin: "A lot of rage. We're discussing mental health, we've got philosophical viewpoints and there's a hint of jaded, I'm-over-your-shit mentality."
Simon: "We've got young fans who haven't had their voices heard, and we know that's a shitty feeling. I feel like this album is a good outlet for that."

What do you think is going to surprise people when they hear the album?
Simon: "The live energy. It's us in the room, slamming. Nothing is sat down, nothing is sampled. The drums are real, Griffin's vocals are real, nothing's fucked with."
Griffin: "It's all highly fucking raw and passionate."

Have you surprised yourselves?
Simon: "Yeah, I mean… you are in that zone, everyone's moving like a fucking train, then you listen back to it and you're like, 'We did that?!'"

Your dads made a serious splash when they dropped their debut album. Did they have any advice for you?
Simon: "My dad has this expression – it's literally the word 'on'. As in, when you hit the light switch, the lights go 'boom' immediately. So when we sat down to record there was no fucking about, it was just, 'One, two, three, let's fucking GO!' But our parents know they need to stay out of it. They want us to fuck up on our own – they want us to go through the bullshit and figure it out."

How close will this album take you on your quest for world domination?
Griffin: "Pretty damn fucking far."
Simon: "I'm going to be cocky because I'm the number one cocky mother-fucker, but I think this is going to send us to the top. If you're not a fan, you can suck it. I know I'm going to get a couple of death threats in my Instagram for that, but…"
Griffin: "We use your fucking death threats for toilet paper!"
Simon: "It's time to be cocky and full of ourselves. It's middle fingers to the sky, so whoever's not with us, fuck right off. Whoever *is* with us, come along for the ride."

VENDED'S DEBUT ALBUM IS EXPECTED LATER THIS YEAR. LISTEN TO NEW SINGLE *THE FAR SIDE* NOW. VENDED TOUR THE UK FROM MAY 24

PRESS

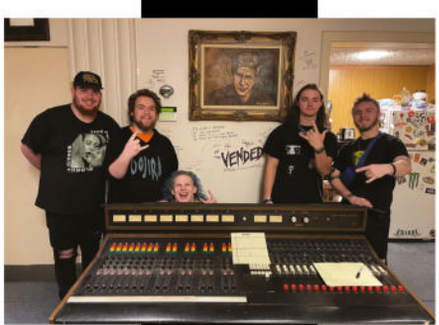
THE FACTS

ALBUM:
1

STUDIO:
Buck Owens Studio, Bakersfield, California

PRODUCER:
Chris Collier

EXPECT:
A cathartic sonic roundhouse combining nu metal, groove and metallic hardcore



LIFE LESSONS

MICHAEL POULSEN

The Volbeat frontman and Asinhell guitarist talks Elvis, the underground metal scene, and getting high on running

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE • PICTURES: ROSS HALFIN

FROM BRUISING HARD rock to thrashing psychobilly breakdowns, Michael Poulsen is a heavy metal chameleon. Starting out in death metal band Dominus, the formidable Dane quickly realised the heavy music scene needed a makeover – and along came Volbeat, throwing out big anthems infused with the bounce of 50s rock'n'roll.

Although Volbeat's latest release, 2021's *Servant Of The Mind*, was met with acclaim, Michael deemed it a perfect time to switch things up once more. Last year ushered in his most ferocious outing to date – an 80s-tinged underground death metal monster of a side-project called Asinhell. We sat down with the man himself, to understand what motivates his hectic hunt for a new sound.

DREAM BIG

"A lot of kids dream of being firemen, football players or huge wrestlers… but I always wanted to be a rock star. From a very young age, I was a dreamer, lying on the floor with my head between two speakers, listening to music and drifting away for hours. My parents would come in and tell me I was gonna ruin my ears, but I just couldn't stop myself. I created this bubble of sound, just fantasising about the performers and how I could surround myself with music. The idea of becoming a musician wasn't at the front of my mind, but I was definitely flirting with the idea. The signs were always there."

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

"For my new project, Asinhell, we wanted to be true to the old-school metal sound. Yes, we have access to all this high-tech, fancy studio equipment – but we wanted to do it like the old days. Fridays have become 'Death Metal Fridays', and we'd rehearse in [drummer] Morten Toft Hansen's small garage. We even recorded it like we used to, back in the days when we were very young and didn't have coin for anything. And it was exactly what we wanted."

STIR THE POT (MUSICALLY SPEAKING)

"When it comes music, everything is about my roots. I started playing death metal when I was 15 or 16, but I also grew up with lots of 50s music. My parents were always listening to Elvis, Johnny Cash and those kind of performers. When I was in my death metal band, Dominus, you weren't really allowed to mix different elements into the music. So, when I formed Volbeat, I made it my mission to cram as many different genres and inspirations as possible into the sound. It felt so liberating."

GETTING OLDER REALLY ISN'T A BAD THING

"I'm 48, and I'm in a very good place in my life. I don't want to be 17 again. It's gotten so much harder and stressful for young people. I'm not into social media – it's quite soulless. I try to keep my kids off technology where I can, making sure they're outside, as I don't want them to be impacted by social media and all the negative things it can involve. I'm happy being older – I don't think I could keep up with society and technology as a modern teenager."

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

"The struggles I've gone through have led to where I am now. There's no good without bad, light cannot live without the darkness. You have to stay focused, stay positive. I've always had that mindset. People go through awful things, but there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. Even though I've faced challenges, I'm in the right place now, so it's been worth it."

"I CAME SECOND PLACE IN A BREAKDANCING COMPETITION"

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

"One of the greatest challenges of my life was becoming a father. Suddenly, it's not all about you – you're secondary. Life definitely changed when I had kids. You become more aware of existence, and don't want to waste time on the wrong things. It forces you to become a better person; you need great personality to bring that to your kids, to make sure they're good people. Being a parent is an amazing challenge."

MUSIC CONNECTS US ALL

"When I started, the internet wasn't really a thing. It was all about getting out there, meeting people – and music was how you could do that. When you loved, say, extreme underground stuff, you quickly became aware of the scene, and you could get involved with those groups of people. The underground scene has always been about connecting with other people. Even now, you see fans travelling to different cities, different countries, and they immediately know they'll meet like-minded people at a show. No matter where you go, if there's a concert, or a music community, you know you've got a friend. There's something very special about the music community."

LET A PROJECT SPEAK FOR ITSELF

"Before the internet, how you promoted yourself was totally different. The only way to be heard was by tape trading, sending out flyers, or meeting people in people in record stores or venues. The internet can make it easy to over-hype yourself – and I never want to over-hype my own music. I hate it when certain bands are shoved in your face – you see them everywhere before you've even listened to one note. Music shouldn't be pushed to a level where it becomes overexposed. If it's good, people will find it."

YOU SHOULD SEE THE WORLD

"When we started touring, it was magical. Suddenly you were going to another country that you'd never been to, and the next day, it'd be somewhere else new. I'd get home and my family would be so excited, saying, 'You've seen more of the world in one week that we have in our whole lives!' The lessons you learn when travelling are so important. I'd say travelling is an incredible thing to experience, and that everyone should immerse themselves in as many cultures as humanly possible."

… BUT HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

"There comes a time when, after many years of touring, you just want to be at home. I'm not really

PRESS/ROSS HALFIN

Michael always knew he was gonna be a rock star

"I HAD TO BE THERE FOR MY DAUGHTER'S BIRTH – EVEN IF IT MEANT CANCELLING A SHOW WITH METALLICA"

a fan of travelling, nowadays. I like being with my family, picking my kids up from school, from kindergarten. I am a homebody – when I get back from tour, sometimes it's a battle for my wife to get me out of my house!"

FAMILY COMES FIRST

"I have a twin sister, and we have such a strong connection. But having a child only made me more aware of how ridiculously special a family connection is. My daughter was born a little too early; when my wife started going into labour, I was actually on tour with Metallica in the US, maybe in New York. My wife called in the middle of the night saying, 'My water just broke', and I knew I had to be there – even if that meant cancelling a show with Metallica. When I went to the hospital and held my daughter for the first time, it was the most amazing thing. I can't even describe it."

TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

"I'm a very bad sleeper, so sometimes with touring, the lack of sleep is terrible. Tour buses are a nightmare. When you've not slept in five or six days, it really impacts your energy, and my voice really suffers. So I'd say sleep is essential. In terms of the body, I've also really gotten into running – I just love it. I need it. It's like a drug for me, that runner's high. Runner's high is an actual high, I promise you!"

WHILE YOU'RE AWAKE, BE USEFUL

"The biggest challenge I've ever faced was losing my father. You become very quickly aware of what life is all about, but also how short it is. My father always said, 'Michael, while you are awake, be useful.' That's a great life lesson – I live by it. I'm not good at sitting around doing nothing. Before music, I've always had hobbies, be that football, cycling, or breakdancing – I even came second place in a breakdancing competition once."

…AND IF YOU CAN'T BE USEFUL, KEEP BUSY!

"I'm always extremely busy, and I always want to be. I surround myself with good people who inspire me to keep pushing myself. I'm very, very proud of what I've accomplished in my musical career. I could retire if I wanted to, but that's not how I function. I'm always inspired, I love what I'm doing. Ultimately, life is all about experience. I believe that the more we live, the more we get done, the better people we become."

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THE STORY BEHIND

MILQUETOAST
HELMET

They helped inspire nu metal and got offers from Hollywood, but New York's Helmet were alt metal weirdos through and through

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

SANDWICHED AWKWARDLY BETWEEN grunge's domination of the music scene in the early 90s and nu metal taking over the world at the end of the decade, sit one of metal's most unique, influential and underappreciated bands: New York alt metal legends Helmet.

One of the first signings to Jimmy Iovine's Interscope Records in the major label gold rush to sign anything vaguely resembling alternative music after the huge success of Nirvana's *Nevermind*, Helmet's second full-length album, *Meantime*, enjoyed some breakthrough success in 1992.

"We had a gold record and a Grammy nomination [for Best Metal Performance for crossover hit *In the Meantime*]," recalls vocalist and guitarist Page Hamilton. "Tommy Lee and Billy Idol liked our band; we were doing pretty well!"

Meantime would go on to sell more than 2 million copies worldwide, but soon the band realised the heat was on to follow the record up with another hit.

"We were this underground New York band, a mix of metal and noise, and we were *hot*," Page tells us. "Everybody was interested. When we had made *Meantime*, there was no pressure, but with [1994 follow-up] *Betty*, everybody had an opinion."

With label people hopeful that they had landed themselves an alt rock hitmaker, Page and Helmet's punk rock background kicked in. Rather than make a carbon copy of what came before or make a more palatable, MTV-friendly record, they decided to retreat in the other direction and make *Betty*: a harsher, weirder, more eclectic and challenging record altogether.

"I'm not comparing myself to these two at all, but Paul Westerberg of The Replacements and Ray Davies of The Kinks, they're both really famous for shooting themselves in the foot, and there is something really appealing about that to me," Page explains of *Betty*'s composition. "I worked with Linkin Park a few years back before Chester passed, and I remember Mike Shinoda saying to me, 'We made our first album and kinda decided to make the second album exactly the same, because we had such great success with it.' And I was like, 'That's kinda the opposite approach to me.' I wasn't trying to give people the finger, but I did want to keep them on their toes."

Ironically, it was at this time that they made the song they're possibly most known for today – the grooving, noisy *Milquetoast*. Like much of *Betty*, the song was inspired by the idea of taking what Helmet had done with *Meantime* and manipulating it into something more unusual.

"I can't remember how it came about. I basically had it already finished [when we came to write]," Page shrugs. "[*Meantime*'s lead single] *Unsung* had that verse-chorus-verse-chorus, but instead of a bridge you had this development section. I really liked that. On *Milquetoast*, I came up with this bit of repetition and brought in these power chords and it sounded really cool. I remember someone saying to me, 'Such a cool idea to have a guitar chord solo!' I'd never thought about it like that."

Although Helmet were in a good place creatively, the outside interference and far higher number of eyes on the band took its toll.

"I liked making that record. It was probably the most stressful of our career, though," Page admits.

One of the biggest bugbears was their label's insistence that an outside producer be brought in to work on *Betty*, something Page didn't understand at the time, considering the band had produced *Meantime* themselves.

"There was stuff like, 'Who's going to produce the record?'" he says. "I just thought that I had done a pretty good job with *Meantime*, so maybe I should just produce the fucking record!"

Eventually, Todd 'T-Ray' Ray was brought in to produce, a man more known for his work with hip hop artists such as Cypress Hill and Nas than any metal bands.

"T-Ray was a really good guy," Page begins. "But he used to say shit to me like, 'Man, you guys have got your shit together more than any band I know! I don't got to do nothing! You're giving me nothing to work with!' and I thought, 'That's cute… so why are we paying you $10,000?'"

Page is more than happy with how *Betty* eventually came out – but, notably, *Milquetoast* was released in an alternate form ahead of the album. The band entered the studio with *Nevermind* producer Butch Vig to record the song for the soundtrack of gothic superhero movie *The Crow*. Released in 1994, *The Crow* went on to attain cult classic status, while its soundtrack – featuring heavy-hitters including Rage Against The Machine, Rollins Band, The Cure and Nine Inch Nails – was a perfect showcase of how the mainstream had come to embrace alternative music.

With its inclusion on a soundtrack, *Milquetoast* – or *Milktoast*, as it was called in this format – was the obvious choice for *Betty*'s lead single, and a video featuring the band along with shots from the movie went into heavy rotation on MTV. Not that Helmet were that fussed about Hollywood.

"I think we might have gone to the premiere," Page nonchalantly tells us. "I remember Brandon Lee had already died at that point [*The Crow* star was tragically killed in a prop gun accident on set]. I did see it; I just don't remember much about it."

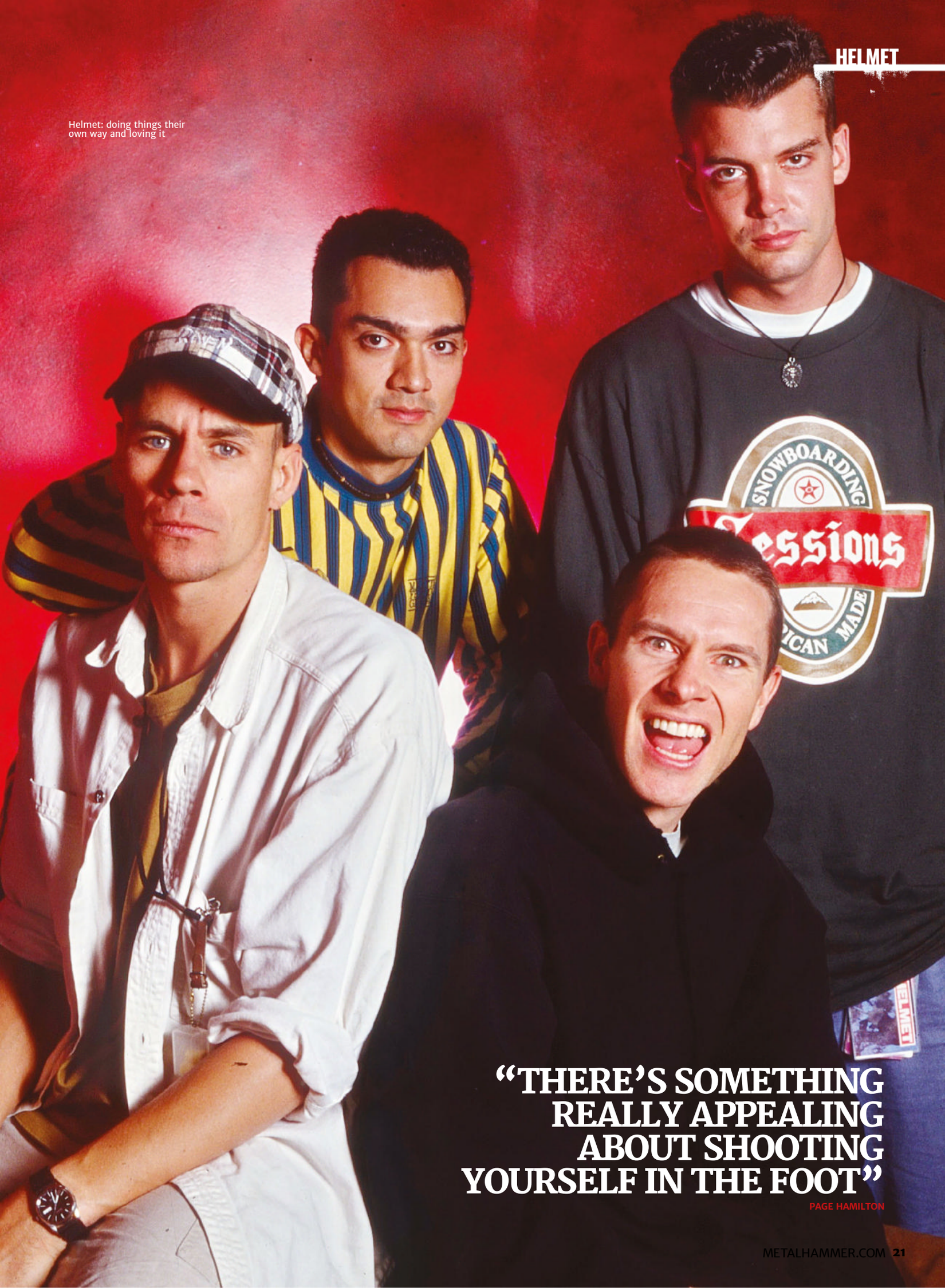
THE FACTS

RELEASED: 1994

ALBUM: *Betty*

PERSONNEL: Page Hamilton (vocals/guitar), Henry Bogdan (bass), Rob Echeverria (guitar), John Stanier (drums)

PG BRUNELLI/ICONICPIX



Helmet: doing things their own way and loving it

"THERE'S SOMETHING REALLY APPEALING ABOUT SHOOTING YOURSELF IN THE FOOT"

PAGE HAMILTON

Helmet in July 1993 (left to right): John Stanier, Henry Bogdan, Rob Echeverria, Page Hamilton

"PEOPLE WOULD SAY, 'YOU'RE NOT METAL!' AND I'D SAY, 'I KNOW, I NEVER SAID I WAS!'"

PAGE HAMILTON

As it turns out, Helmet weren't just invited to be part of the movie's soundtrack, but to actually appear in the film itself. Page can't remember if Helmet were asked to take the nightclub scene ultimately filled by My Life With The Thrill Kill Kult, or if they would have had their own segment, but he does remember his response…

"We turned it down," he says. "We weren't striving to be played on MTV; we weren't MTV guys. I was a bit of snob at 28."

Milquetoast ultimately reached No.39 on the US Billboard Mainstream Rock Chart, but wasn't enough to propel *Betty* to the heights the label had envisioned on its release on June 21, 1994. Although the band achieved a career chart peak when *Betty* hit No.45 on the Billboard 200, it failed to match the commercial heights of its predecessor and the other bands on Interscope.

Reviews were mixed at best, sales were down, and, due to the very non-metal front cover image of a woman picking flowers, along with Helmet's deliberately demanding flights of fancy into jazz, country and blues on the album, the fanbase that had found them a couple of years before were left confused.

"A friend of mine had this 14-year-old kid, and he was like, 'Can I bring my kid to see you?'" Page remembers. "This kid comes in and goes, 'Why did you put a woman on the cover with flowers?' and I go, 'Because I thought it was funny.' He was like, 'Nah, I didn't like that. I didn't like it as much as the album before', and I go, 'Yeah… I know.'"

That rigid kind of thinking is something that Page admits he doesn't identify with.

"*Milquetoast* is probably heavier than anything on *Meantime*," he reasons. "But people still go, 'Nah, you did that weird jazz thing.' They cherry-pick. Like, yeah, we play jazz for about 60 seconds and then go back to making loads of noise. People would say, 'You're not metal!' and I'd say, 'I know, I never said I was!' I dunno why people give a shit about what you're meant to call yourselves."

The initial failure of *Betty* meant that Helmet only made one more album, 1997's *Aftertaste*, before splitting. But in the years that followed, the nu metal scene began to take the downtuned, piston-like rhythmic thrust of Helmet – and songs such as *Milquetoast* in particular – and channel that influence into great commercial success. Not that Helmet were aware. In 1997, the band opened for Korn and Limp Bizkit, and even had Coal Chamber support them. When asked today if he had any negative feelings towards the nu metal scene for "borrowing" so many ideas from Helmet, and being far more successful than them, well, it appears ignorance is bliss for Page.

"I'm embarrassed to say that I don't really know that music," he smiles. "I know a lot of the guys and have seen them all live, but I don't own the records – it's just not what's in my rotation."

As the years went by, *Betty* began to get reappraised, both by the metal world at large and by Helmet's fans – becoming, for many, the band's definitive album. Having split up in 1998, Helmet reformed in 2003 and have been going strong ever since. Page admits he even sees a higher level of excitement when *Milquetoast* comes out in their set now than he did back in 1994.

"I love the album," he says happily. "We did the entire album live in 2014 and had such a blast – *Milquetoast* is a fun song!" H

HELMET'S LATEST ALBUM, *LEFT*, IS OUT NOW VIA EARMUSIC

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DELILAH BON

The nu gen star fighting against misogyny for bodily autonomy

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

WHEN LAUREN TATE was a teenager, she felt like an alien. As a lonely kid growing up in Barnsley, she had been making music and singing in her bedroom since she was 12, but her ambitions were mocked by her classmates and derided by her teachers.

"I didn't have many friends at all," she says today. "I was a loser, a loner. I would get bullied at school and people would make fun of my voice. All the teachers used to tell me I would never make it in music. It was constantly hammered into my head that it was a pipe dream."

Well, what did they know? Today, the 26-year-old self-styled 'brat-punk' performs under the moniker Delilah Bon. And her spiky, unapologetic fusion of punk, nu metal, pop and hip hop has seen her join genre-smashing artists such as Scene Queen (who she's toured with), ALT BLK ERA (who she collaborated with on the song *Witch*), and Cassyette on the front lines of metal's new guard. Brash, confrontational and political, her force-of-nature, self-titled, 2021 debut album was a call to arms for a diverse, enthusiastic fanbase, while her gigs feel more like exorcisms to sweat and scream out the challenges of modern life.

"I love shouting," Delilah nods. "It's such a release. I want to be seen. I want to be heard. I want to help people. I want to channel my anger and I put it somewhere."

That rage is best exemplified on her visceral 2022 single, *Dead Men Don't Rape*. A roar of anger in response to the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, which lead to the curtailing of abortion rights across America, the lyrics also tackle misogyny, sexual assault, bodily autonomy and societal discrimination. Over grinding, crashing guitars, Delilah veers from abrasive shrieks to breathless rapping: *'A gun's got more fucking rights than a girl / Keep your politics out of my body.'*

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Punk, nu metal, pop and hip hop condensed into a cathartic shot of rage

FOR FANS OF:
Scene Queen, Cassyette, ALT BLK ERA

LISTEN TO:
Dead Men Don't Rape

To date, the track has clocked up more than 2.5 million streams on Spotify, but received a frightening level of backlash from certain corners of the internet.

"A lot of American men were messaging me saying that they were going to kill me," she says. "And they were going to come and kill my fans."

The response rattled her, and it was a year until she returned with incendiary 2023 single *I Wish A Bitch Would*, a howl against male violence over acerbic riffs and synths.

"I brought out that song to say I won't be silenced," she says firmly. "That I will continue."

Having listened to pop music as a young teen, Delilah discovered the thrill of nu metal through Slipknot and Kittie, but it was the raw, unfiltered rage of riot grrrl bands like 7 Year Bitch and Bikini Kill that really set lightbulbs popping off in her head. It was the first time she had encountered artists pushing back against the oppression of the male gaze and openly challenging societal norms, and she felt understood and empowered.

"I realised I could get my guitar and I could scream and be angry, and it doesn't matter about looking presentable," she explains.

Her love for the riot grrrl scene led to her form alt rock band Hands Off Gretel in 2015, although she quickly became disillusioned by disrespectful behaviour at gigs.

"I would look out in the crowd and there'd be no women at all. It would all be older guys aged 50 plus," she remembers. "They would stand at the front with their cameras, and film under your skirt. They'd be trying to kiss me, putting their arms around me and feeling my bum."

> **"A LOT OF MEN MESSAGED ME, SAYING THEY WERE GOING TO KILL ME AND MY FANS"**

When the pandemic struck, and Hands Off Gretel were forced to abandon their touring plans, Lauren channelled that frustration and fury into new music, playing around with sounds and experimenting with rapping for the first time. Delilah Bon, she says, was only supposed to be a fleeting side-project, but that changed as soon as she was able to perform the songs live in 2021.

"I could feel the power that was building with the music," she says. "It was a whole different audience of girls, non-binary people, trans people. I knew this was what I'd been meaning to do."

Although Delilah Bon might have initially come from a place of anger, the resounding message Lauren wants to take forward in her music is one of positivity and self-love. Having finished recording her second, as yet unnamed album, she considers it to be a reminder to her fans, and also to herself, to remember your worth.

"It's very much about my own confidence in myself and reminding myself that I deserve to be here," she says, thinking back to school, and the days when she had to fight for her vision. "When I went to the Heavy Music Awards, I was meeting press, and they didn't know who I was. I remember being like, 'It doesn't matter that they don't know who you are yet – they will soon.'"

For Delilah, that wait is over. H

DELILAH BON'S SECOND ALBUM IS DUE LATER THIS YEAR. SHE PLAYS DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL IN JUNE

PRESS/HELEN TATE

With Delilah Bon, Lauren has found her calling

Good luck trying to pigeonhole these guys

OXYMORRONS

The Fever 333- and Corey Taylor-approved genre-hoppers breaking down boundaries in alternative music

WORDS: YASMINE SUMMAN • PICTURE: TOMMY VO

OXYMORRONS HAVE A lot to say, but one word you won't find in their vocabulary? 'Rest.' The foursome, from Queens, New York, began releasing music back in 2015 – but shifted gears with their 2021 EP, *Mohawks & Durags*, with Fever 333's Jason Aalon Butler featuring on the song *Definition* and serving as a mentor who would help get their music out to the wider world.

"He's a big advocate for our community," says guitarist Jafé Paulino. "It was great to meet someone that we felt understood us, and not just sonically – also culturally and what we stand for."

Since then, they've been on a rocket ride of playing festivals and touring with some of their favourite artists, including supporting Bad Omens in North America and joining Corey Taylor on both sides of the Atlantic for his 2023 solo shows.

Pinning the band down to just one genre is a struggle. Jafé and vocalist KI explain that the band's own label of "melanin punk" – also the title of their debut album – accurately covers the vast influences in their music, from alternative and metal to rap, hip hop and punk. Even beyond the stylistic concerns of their sound, "melanin punk" encompasses a wider culture and lifestyle shift in alternative music that uplifts Black and Brown artists in a way we've not really seen until recently.

"Oxymorrons is bigger than music," Jafé says. "It's bigger than us. It's more about shifting the culture. I think with everything that happened during 2020 – socially, to race relations, to the music industry – it finally felt like everything was aligning. The general public was ready for it."

"We always knew we could be part of the change," KI continues. "It's bigger than the music. All this great stuff is actually touching the hearts of the people." H

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Stomping alt metal with a throughline to modern pop and hip hop

FOR FANS OF:
Ho9909, Fever 333, Sleep Token

LISTEN TO:
Definition

***MELANIN PUNK* IS OUT NOW VIA MASCOT. OXYMORRONS WILL PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL ON FRIDAY JUNE 14**

PRESS/TOMMY VO

Resolve: TikTok famous, and coming to the UK in May

PRESS/ALEXIS FONTAINE

RESOLVE

The French metalcore hopefuls looking to turn viral success into real-world results

WORDS: JEN THOMAS • PICTURES: ALEXIS FONTAINE

SINCE THEIR FORMATION in 2017, Resolve have set out to put French metalcore on the map. They've shared stages with genre heavyweights such as Every Time I Die, While She Sleeps and Architects, in a quest to become their country's answer to those bands. Resolve's 2021 debut, *Between Me And The Machine*, was a solid step in the right direction, but things really took off when their single *Older Days* – a collaboration with Ten56. and Paleface Swiss – became a surprise viral hit in August 2023.

Mixing electronic and trap influences with a three-part vocal line, *Older Days* clocked up more than 700,000 views on YouTube and one million streams on Spotify, catching Resolve by surprise.

"We're too old for TikTok and it even did well on there!" jokes vocalist Anthony Diliberto.

Resolve's mixture of visceral brutality and hopeful melodies might be typical of modern metalcore, but they don't want to be predictable.

"We didn't want to close our music off to be only metal and breakdowns," Anthony says. "We're an eclectic metal band, but we do love pop stuff too and want to do more."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: A cathartic soundtrack for your angriest days

FOR FANS OF: LANDMVRKS, Bad Omens, Ten56.

LISTEN TO: *Human*

Resolve are now hoping to capitalise on their newfound internet stardom when they come to the UK in May.

"We've never done a proper headline tour outside of France," Anthony admits. "I'm really excited… although scared at the same time, because I don't know what to expect or what British fans will make of us, but we really want this to translate well. We're setting our sights high!"

***HUMAN* IS OUT NOW VIA ARISING EMPIRE. RESOLVE'S UK TOUR STARTS ON MAY 4 AT LONDON'S UNDERWORLD**

NO TERROR IN THE BANG

Cinematic French prog metal with high art aspirations

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: DAVID MORGANTI

NO TERROR IN The Bang singer Sofia Bortoluzzi cannot contain her excitement following the French progressive metal band's all-too-brief performance at Le 106 in the group's hometown of Rouen.

"This was definitely the best show we've given so far!" she enthuses. "I was so excited before the show and a bit frustrated after it because it was too short. But it was amazing."

No Terror In The Bang's second album, *Heal*, straddles a twisted intersection where massive, stop-start riffing, deft rhythms and Sofia's tormented, harsh tones collide with her clean, mezzo-soprano vocals backed by disconcerting piano notes.

"I really like to have those two personalities," she says. "Sometimes I need to expel all the anguish inside of me… but that fragile part of me is still there."

No Terror In The Bang was formed by a group of friends teaching and studying at a conservatory, and take their name from Alfred Hitchcock's description of how tension generated in anticipation of an act outweighs the shock of the act itself. Sofia is looking forward to ramping up the band's live production.

"We would like to do something bigger," she says. "A cinematic metal show. We are just starting out, but we have a vision."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: An unsettling cabaret that attacks and bewilders through a meeting of progressive metal and distressed performance art

FOR FANS OF: Jinjer, Sleep Token, Spiritbox

LISTEN TO: *Warrior*

***HEAL* IS OUT NOW VIA KLONOSPHERE**

More Bang for your buck: the band have cinematic ambitions

PRESS/DAVID MORGANTI

Meth. find relief through release

METH.

Punishing experimental noise from the industrial heart of Chicago

WORDS: JACK ROGERS • PICTURES: VANESSA VALADEZ

IF YOU PLAN on going to a Meth. show, be prepared to see vocalist Seb Alvarez bleed. Partly influenced by a childhood love for professional wrestling, the Chicago band's physically punishing onstage antics – set to a sludge-spattered fusion of death metal and noise – are actually a vessel for deep emotional release.

"There's this weird sense of relief," Seb explains. "Everything that is stressing me out, I can feel escaping. But we also want to make people feel uncomfortable."

That makes perfect sense when you consider the sheer intensity of the noise Meth. make, particularly on new record *Shame*. A furious, contorted and stark piece of experimental brutality, it has allowed Seb to purge the demons that plague his mind and body, from understanding a recent bipolar diagnosis to tackling his drinking habits.

"This record needed to be as visceral as humanly possible," he admits. "We wanted to write something that felt really heavy and gross. So, I needed to sit and stew within myself and take things on in a more therapeutic way to achieve that. It's been really complicated to feel that vulnerable, but it's allowed the whole thing to be as natural as possible. It felt like the correct next step."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Chaotic and cathartic post-hardcore that rips and tears at the heart and soul with reckless abandon

FOR FANS OF: Converge, Full Of Hell, The Body

LISTEN TO: *Doubt*

***SHAME* IS OUT NOW VIA PROSTHETIC**

PRESS/VANESSA VALADEZ

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

DOOL
THE SHAPE OF FLUIDITY BUNDLE
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS
£55.60

SKILFULLY WEAVING TOGETHER prog, psych, doom and plain ol' ROCK, Dool's third studio album is so damn good – and so damn *immersive* – you'll end up playing it into the ground as you try to unravel its many mysteries. It seems the band are aware you could be burning through multiple copies of *The Shape Of Fluidity*, too, hence this lavish set featuring no fewer than three separate editions. Herein you'll find a copy each on clear/black marbled vinyl, CD (inside an artbook) and tape (sorry, MiniDisc fans…), as well as four art prints and a signed certificate testifying to the bundle's authenticity. They even sling all this stuff in a Dool-emblazoned tote bag, which mightn't be fluid-resistant but at least looks sharp. If you like what you see then don't snooze – a mere 500 copies have made their way into the world.
tinyurl.com/dool-bundle

TALES OF THE WEIRD SUBSCRIPTION
£54/SIX MONTHS

Besides superb lower-level bathroom facilities, the British Library's got a lot going for it. One such merit is this monthly revival of 19th- and 20th-century weird fiction, replete with new introductions and editorial notes. Spooky.
tinyurl.com/weird-subs

AMARANTHE T-SHIRT
£23.99

The Catalyst is album number seven for Amaranthe – lucky for them, and lucky for us. It's ambitious, anthemic and, most of all, *audacious* – a marked contrast to this understated shirt that bears the band's crest.
tinyurl.com/amaranthe-tee

KORPIKLAANI MUG
£41.90

Finland's indigenous people, the Sámi, have long quaffed from traditional kuksa cups. Honour them with, um, this Korpiklaani-branded kuksa. To be fair, the band started out playing Sámi folk tunes back in the 90s.
tinyurl.com/korpik-cup

WYRD SISTERS TEA

£8.49

It is tea, or is it a potion? It's tea, obviously, but Black Prism's aromatic blend of rooibos, cloves, cardamom, herbs, dried fruits and flower petals will leave you rather stirred, whether brewed in a cauldron or a mug.

tinyurl.com/wyrd-brew

BLASPHEMIC BLEND COFFEE

£7.99-£29.99

Conjured in collaboration with blackened deathcore oiks To Obey A Tyrant, this ichor with notes of darkest chocolate and cursed caramel is a gift from the ancient gods patrolling the Ethiopian and Central American slopes.

tinyurl.com/blasphemic-beans

STAY BRUTAL COFFEE MUG

£15

The perfect vessel for your sacrilegious supping, this mug makes it clear that the defibrillating jolt of a cuppa isn't just for mornings, it's a way of life, whether ripping it up in a moshpit or visiting your nan.

tinyurl.com/brutal-mug

DVNE LADIES TANK TOP

£21.40

What better time to rock some Dvne merch now that the combined cheekbones of Zendaya and Timothée Chalamet have set the world aflame? Plus, this airy, sleeveless effort is just perfect for the arid plains of Arrakis.

tinyurl.com/dvne-tanktop

WE ARE REWIND CASSETTE PLAYER

£133/£138

Looking for something to play your Dool or Ihsahn bundle cassette on? These Gallic boffins have created the ultimate hi-fi-quality portable device, and it can record mixtapes too, for more old-school cred.

www.wearerewind.com/en-gb

IHSAHN CASSETTE BUNDLE

£20

Featuring both a metal and orchestral version, Ihsahn's new, self-titled album is a glorious ode to adventure. Get some trve cred with this exclusive, limited-to-300 *Hammer* bundle featuring the metal version on old-school tape!

tinyurl.com/ihsahn-bundle

WEDNESDAY BACKPACK

£39.99

Wanna dance to The Cramps without dropping your brolly, sabre, and crossbow? Secure them in this Wednesday Addams-inspired backpack – it's vegan leather, and you can probably fit a few piranhas in there, too..

tinyurl.com/wednesday-pack

ERRA T-SHIRT

£25

If your mates only listen to regular metalcore, it's time for them to see the Erra of their ways. Throw shapes to the band's sixth album, *Cure*, bedecked in these threads, screaming, 'It's *progressive* metalcore, actually!'

tinyurl.com/erra-tee

LOVECRAFT COMIC

£10

What's that thing on the doorstep? Oh, it's just another Amazon delivery that's been left out in the rain. Hopefully it doesn't contain this graphic adaptation of Lovecraft's ominously titled tale, otherwise it'll be even *more* pulpy.

tinyurl.com/lovecraft-comic

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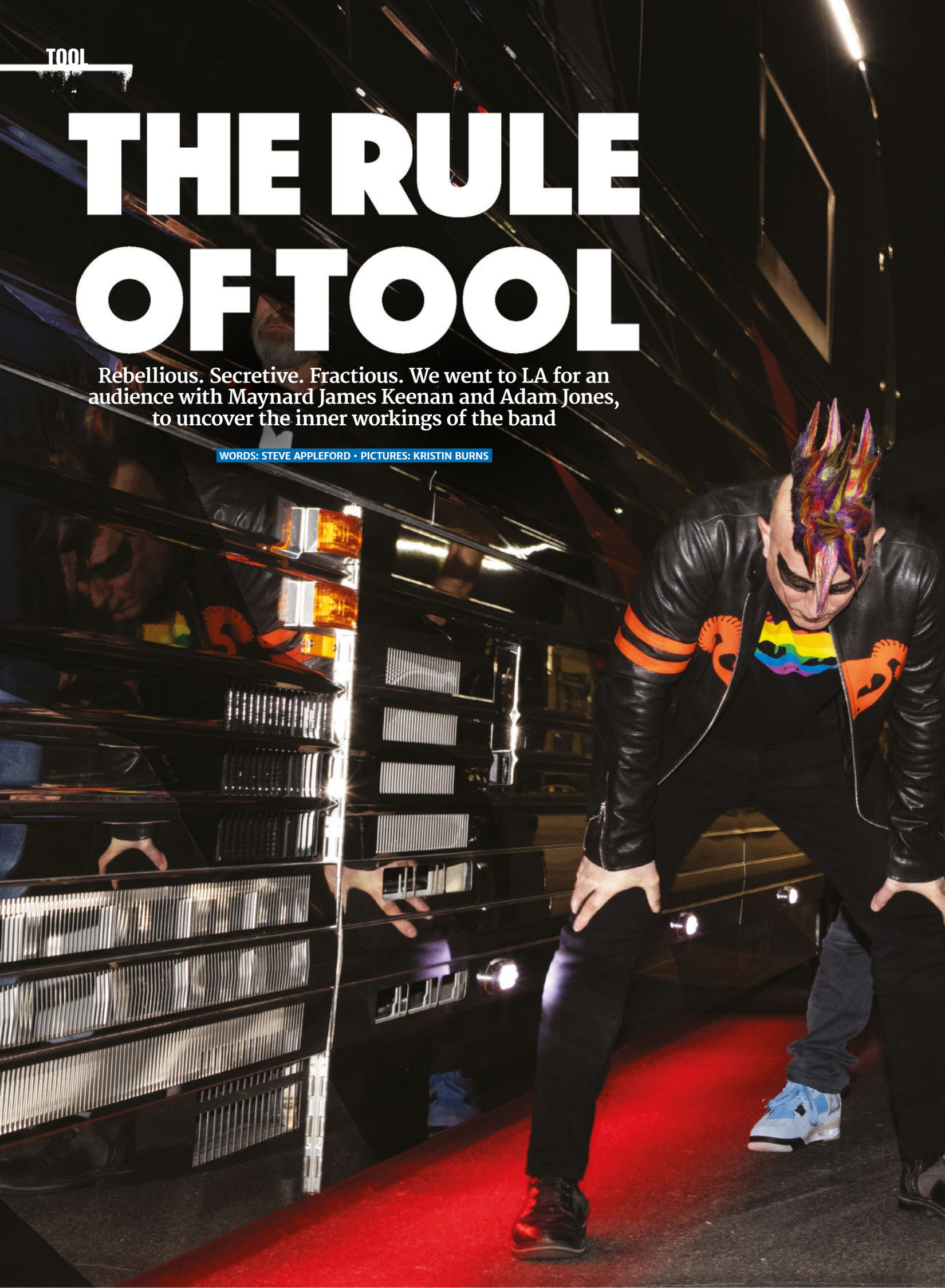
THE RULE OF TOOL

Rebellious. Secretive. Fractious. We went to LA for an audience with Maynard James Keenan and Adam Jones, to uncover the inner workings of the band

WORDS: STEVE APPLEFORD • PICTURES: KRISTIN BURNS



KISS
VOID

Hours before showtime in Los Angeles, Adam Jones is making art. The Tool guitarist spends most of his days on the road like this, reaching into a box of coloured markers backstage and adding drawings and his signature to posters commemorating each night of the tour. Tonight also happens to be St. Valentine's Day, and the first of two sold-out hometown concerts at LA's Crypto.com Arena, but there is no entourage in sight as Adam happily draws away.

"I like doing it because I love drawing," says Adam. He's dressed in a black t-shirt commemorating the fictional shark fisherman Quint from *Jaws*. And on the wall behind him is a banner in the colours of the Mexican flag, with the image of two beefy masked wrestlers and the words 'Lucha Bros'.

Adam is sitting just steps away from the concrete hallway where, in 2019, he finally met his personal guitar hero, Eddie Van Halen, who attended a Tool show that night in one of his last public appearances.

"If I had died right after that, I would've been happy," Adam says. "That was incredible. Meeting your heroes is crazy."

Adam and the rest of Tool have that same effect for much of the current generation of heavy music listeners. After a 14-year wait, Tool showed they were still at the height of their powers with 2019's *Fear Inoculum*, an epic alt metal collection of deep, expansive songs that were soaring and filled with darkness.

The band – Adam, singer Maynard James Keenan, drummer Danny Carey and bassist Justin Chancellor – have been bringing those songs to live audiences ever since, and will play the UK during May and June. The band remain a mysterious entity to most, but Adam is chatty and amiable backstage as he reflects on the band's past and present.

What is it about the partnership you have with Maynard and the others that still works at this point?
Adam Jones: "One thing, we split everything four ways. We're friends and we also let each other be each other. It's such a relaxing, no-pressure kind of relationship. And then we're all very different in tastes of music and what we do outside of the band, but when we meet as the four of us in the centre of this entity called Tool, it just works. It's really magical and it is very rewarding. It's very uninhibited. I have the best job in the whole world, you know?"

When Tool were finishing up this last record, a lot of people out there were impatiently wondering when it would arrive. Was that pressure on the band, or was it completely ignored?
"Most of the people that you hear from on those things – like, 'When's your next record?' – when you do finish it, they're like, 'OK, when's your next one?' You can't make people happy. We have this very selfish approach to art. It's our rules. When you start trying to make people happy, you're losing yourself. You're losing that burn inside you of why you do what you do."

You've set pretty high standards for yourself at this point. Is it a challenge to meet those standards?
"We try to find that common ground and remember the love of music, instead of going, 'What did good on the last record? Well, we should do that again.' We're doing what we do. I just always want us all to get along. I don't want to fight. We *do* fight. But just let people be who they are.

"There was a time where Maynard and I were talking, we were using analogies, but I used painting. And I said, 'OK, Maynard, I'm a painter who does sketches and thinks about concepts, and I look at other masters' works of art, and I figure out the lighting, and then I have to figure out my palette of colours, and then do a couple practice paintings, and then do the painting, and then maybe sand up part of it, blah, blah, blah… And it turns out really good.' And Maynard can sit down and paint it in one day, and it's really good! Ha ha ha! It's two different approaches. And we have to be respectful about that. And the other guys too, not just me and Maynard."

Our understanding is that the music largely comes first?
"Almost 99%. When you're with other guys, it has its own journey. After a while, Maynard was just like, 'Look, you guys do your thing, and then let me know when you're about ready.' And it works. That's that thing where you're letting people be themselves. When we start to write, Justin and I bring riffs in, and Danny Carey will take a simple riff and right away just play the most opposite, mind-boggling time signature to the point where you go, 'What are you doing?'

"It reminds me a lot of when I used to work on movie make-up effects, and the process of designing something: latex, silicone, foam rubber, polyurethane? How is it being lit? And all that stuff is a fucking pain in the ass. And then dealing with movie people is the worst thing ever. But then when you see it on the screen, you're like, 'Let's do it again! It's great!' That's the same thing with music when we finish – it's such a hard process. So when people want it – 'Do another record!' – it's a compliment, you know?"

Have you already started writing for the next record?
"No, we're jamming. We haven't really hit that mark. At some point someone's going to call another person and go, 'Hey, what do you think?' No. 'OK.' Sometime later, 'Hey, you ready?' And they go, 'Yeah, I'm ready.' 'I'm ready too. Let's start jamming.'"

Several years back, we interviewed Mastodon, and they were talking about their first tour with Tool, and described how you guys were actually pranksters behind the scenes…
"Well, they could take it. I just thought we were cut from the same piece of cloth. I really liked Brent [Hinds]. He's such a good guitar player. But it was also really easy to fuck with them.

"I've always said, we take what we do very seriously, but we don't take ourselves seriously. And that's the truth. You should see just our text chains – me and Maynard and Danny and Justin. Half of it's like, 'OK, we need to make a decision', the other half is just fucking memes and quotes from stupid movies."

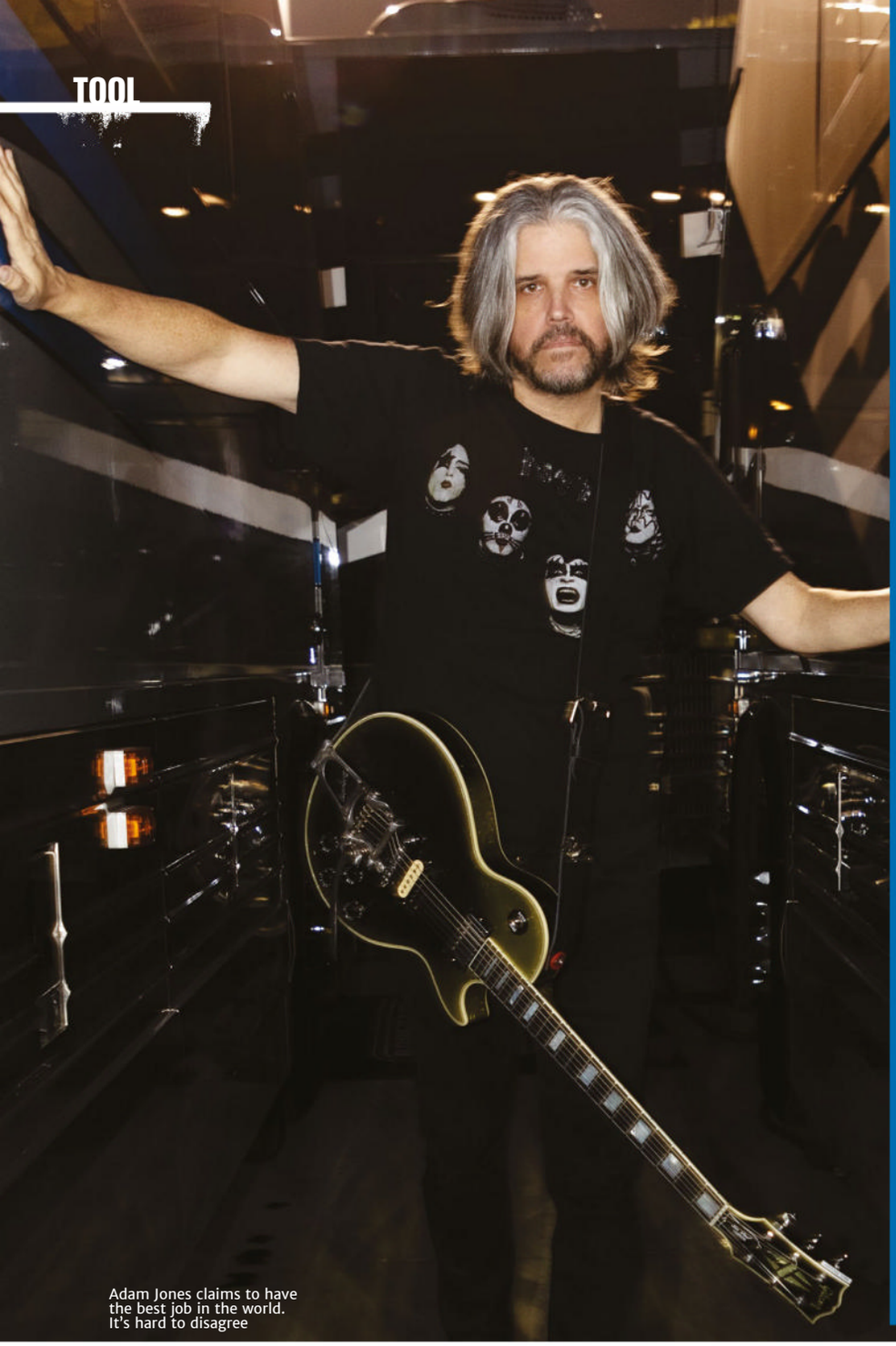
"TOOL IS A COMPLICATED BEAST WITH A LOT OF EGOS"
MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN

Is there anything from Tool's early days that you miss?
"I look at it like it's the same. I mean, we were younger, probably in a van. Probably had more energy than I have now. My fingers worked a little better than they do now. But I would probably say where I'm at now is my favourite time. I have a family now."

Because of the way Tool present yourselves, along with some very enigmatic visuals, do you think there are misunderstandings about what you guys are really about?
"Yes, absolutely. But that's kind of the magic of it: it's left open for interpretation. Remember when you were a kid and you bought some record, and all you had was the art to look at? Then you did an interpretation of what they were saying? It's very personal. I've never heard anyone go, 'Hey, your music fucked my life up.' I've heard people go, 'Hey, this song meant this to me and blah, blah, blah…' I don't have to go, 'Well, that's really not what it's about.' That's what you get out of it. And it's great."

At tonight's show, Tool won't be using the big screens to show close-ups of your faces, and that's intentional…
"It's not about our personalities. It's about losing yourself and to forget about your wicked life for two hours. It's entertainment. What would I want to see?"

Maynard James Keenan is Tool's "concentric weirdo", but dammit, it works!



Adam Jones claims to have the best job in the world. It's hard to disagree

"I RIP MY GUTS OUT WHEN I LOOK AT IT"

As Tool's main artist-in-residence, we asked Adam Jones to reveal some of his biggest cultural influences to date

DUNE
As a former special effects artist on major Hollywood films, Adam is a connoisseur of sci-fi. For him, it begins with Frank Herbert's epic 1965 novel, *Dune*, and especially this infamous quote: 'I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear.'

"Last night I watched *Dune* again – the new [2021] movie, which I really like. I also love the [1984] David Lynch one," says Adam. "That's one of my favourite sci-fi books. Frank Herbert's writing is so good. That book has really affected me. It's affected my thinking. I've recited the 'Fear is the mind-killer' [mantra] many times when I've been stressed out! Ha ha ha! It really helps."

CAMILLE ROSE GARCIA
California-based artist Camille Rose Garcia is known for paintings of gothic playful scenes with a dark streak, rooted in ancient cartoons and Mexican culture. Tool have included her work on their show posters.

"I really love her," says Adam. "I can see her influences – like a lot of 30s and 40s cartoons and old Disney stuff – but she has her own thing. I feel like when I see one of her paintings, I'm in her head."

GIBSON GUITARS
In recent years, Adam has been releasing signature guitars through Gibson, with vibrant finishes that include reproductions of some of his favourite artists, including Mark Ryden and vintage Frank Frazetta.

"I didn't really like how they treated me before. They now have a guy [CEO Cesar Gueikian] who's a good businessman, but he is also passionate and loves music. He wants people to pick up a 2020 guitar and go, 'This has quality like a '57.'"

JULIE HEFFERNAN
Brooklyn surrealist Julie Heffernan creates paintings of women in hallucinogenic contact with nature. Her work has also been used on Tool show posters.

"She is an amazing painter and artist and has an approach to conceptualising a story in her paintings. I have Julie Heffernan's paintings hanging in my house, and they tear me up. So every morning I get to wake up and look at one and just go, 'Ugh', and just rip my guts out when I look at it and enjoy the beauty."

That's what Tool fans have come to expect. But 20 or 30 years ago, going to see Eddie Van Halen play, would you have wanted to see him blown up on the big screen if there was one?
"Well, it's different times. It's a different band. Where Van Halen probably would've given people a closer look of them running around onstage and doing kicks. And that's what's so great about it. Art has no rules – none. And when you start following them, I just think you kind of lose yourself a little bit."

How do you normally spend your time after you've played? Since this is a hometown show for you, do you go right home or do you hang out here for a while?
"I got home at three in the morning. My wife got up, hung out. It was great. I just had my third kid. Well, I accidentally knocked up my wife before Covid, and then we miscarried and we were like, 'Oh, let's have another one, goddamn it.' So I have a 10-year-old, a seven-year-old, and a six-and-a-half-month-old, and I couldn't be happier. So I just hung out with them and I come in here. Everyone in the world wants to come to the show, but I have my close friends. I will spend time with the friends that came because I love them, and then go home. My wife's going to be asleep anyway."

"WE DON'T TAKE OURSELVES SERIOUSLY. AND THAT'S THE TRUTH"

ADAM JONES

You went to high school in Illinois with Tom Morello and played in a band together. It seems like a miracle that you would both become so successful in music.
"It's crazy. But the thing is, I have a lot of friends that have done very well because I hang out with heroes. Maynard – I saw that in him. We were friends and we listened to *Master Of Puppets* and would headbang in his car, and then we'd go home and watch [1985's] *Demons* and Dario Argento/Lamberto Bava shit. We had so much in common, and I just saw his drive. When I heard a demo tape where he was singing, I was like, 'God, man, you can sing!'

"We always talked about putting together a band, and I just wouldn't let it go. And then Danny Carey, who is Eddie Van Halen on drums – I'm not kidding. And Justin, when it comes to music, he's as sharp as any blade on a knife."

Maynard James Keenan also agreed to meet *Hammer* in Los Angeles, but when his throat seized up hours before the concert, he bowed out, spending his time regaining his voice in time for the show.

"No noise came out. I had to get shots and all kinds of shit just to get the show off," he explains days later on the phone, then adds his personal code regarding live gigs: "I don't cancel. That sucks, cancelling."

Onstage, he seemed very much the same explosive frontman, dressed in a black vest, white sleeves rolled to his biceps, a crisp mohawk wig on his head, as the big screens roiled with images of hot lava. As ever, he sang from platforms at the rear of the stage, often in silhouette, sometimes pacing like a caged animal. On *Pneuma*, his vocal was filled with heaviness and deep feeling: *'We are spirit bound to this flesh... We are will and wonder, bound to recall – remember!'*

"THAT'S ON THE LIST OF REGRETS – A LONG WIG WITH HAIR IN YOUR MOUTH"

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN

Earlier, the audience were instructed to keep their phones out of sight for most of the 11-song performance, but when one fan near the stage started shooting the set anyway, Maynard stopped mid-song to shout: 'Put your fucking phone away, dickhead! Seriously.'

Tool play by their own rules and personal idiosyncrasies, and have survived long past a first decade as mainstream rock hit-makers and MTV stars to become a deeper, more profound version of themselves. With years between albums, it's not nearly enough to keep Maynard occupied. He currently has both of his other musical projects – A Perfect Circle and Puscifer – active as recording and touring acts. But Maynard is notably impatient with his first and most popular band, and would love to get them on a path to writing and recording another album before they die.

Tool have lasted a lot longer than most of your contemporaries. What is it that works with Tool, that keeps the band going at the level you want it to be at?
Maynard James Keenan: "I think the mistakes that we've made along the way aren't the kind of mistakes that end the career. They're just the kind of mistakes that kind of delay the career in a weird way. We made the correct mistakes, not the wrong mistakes. I don't know, like not doing heroin! Ha ha ha! There's no divine plan. This is just fate. We are the last one standing for whatever unplanned reason."

Is the way Tool works very different from the way you create music with A Perfect Circle and Puscifer?
"I think there's something to be said for friction and the need to create. When you get fat and cosy, that art tends to disappear a little bit. Over here, we're like those overcrowded rats in a terrarium, with plenty of food, plenty of water, plenty of bedding, and we just start eating each other because we're bored. When you have to actually struggle to find the food, find the shelter, find the clothing, there's something to be said for that friction. It's where the art happens. But when you're rich and cosy, time is a beast, 'cause there's no sense of urgency. So that's why I think things take a little longer, 'cause of the success. It almost is a deterrent, and you don't really have a sense of

Danny Carey: "Eddie Van Halen on drums"

The super-sharp Justin Chancellor

Tool: worth the wait

"HE WAS A FRUSTRATED ROCK GUITAR PLAYER"

It's been 30 years since the death of US comedian Bill Hicks. We asked Maynard to tell us about his friend

Bill Hicks was a firebrand comic who examined the absurdities of modern life, religion, drugs and more with a sharp eye and an even sharper tongue. Tool were friendly with him, and they once planned to tour together. The band dedicated *Ænima* to Bill after he died from cancer in 1994, at age 32, and sampled his voice on the track *Third Eye*. Thirty years on, we asked Maynard about his lasting memories of Bill, and he poked gentle fun at the comedian's modest musical skills.

"We would talk on the phone quite a bit," remembers Maynard. "We had some good conversations and long nights. I remember him working on an album where he was trying to integrate music and guitar into his final release.

"He would always make fun of himself on that, like a frustrated rock guitar player with a Messianic complex. And it was definitely that. That album was him trying to insert these not-great guitar riffs into his comedy, which worked when they were edited down. But what he wanted to leave in was like, 'Dude, some of that needs to be on the editing floor.'"

urgency. So a month can pass with nothing happening and you don't feel it. Whereas if somebody is desperate to put food on the table, you're probably a little more efficient and a little more organised to get things moving along."

The last Tool record took a long time to come together.
"Those guys will argue with me 'til we're blue in the face, but it didn't need to take that long."

Do you think the experience of making *Fear Inoculum* will have any impact on the making of the next one?
"Well, considering one or more of us will be dead if we wait another 14 years, we might want to figure out a better way. So maybe figure out how to move faster. Make it the priority. You don't have to skip any of the art part. You don't have to skip any of the creative process. You just have to force yourself to be in the creative space more often and more consistently.

"Tool is a more complicated beast with a lot of egos and a lot of other things going on in our lives. But all the creativity's there, the songs and the ideas can flow and the arguments ensue. As soon as we get past the arguments, we can get shit done! Ha ha ha! I think we could do it more efficiently. And I think everyone's on the same page that we have to get through that, because we can't drag this out another 14 years."

"RYAN REYNOLDS IS JUST A NICE GUY. I'M NOT A NICE GUY"
MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN

You're very good at changing your persona from one band to the next, using wigs, costumes and make-up. How do you separate what makes sense for Tool vs. A Perfect Circle vs. Puscifer?
"Sonically, it's going to be different, but it has to be visually different just to separate it. So you kind of paint yourself in that box of having that ridiculous wig on. That's on the list of regrets – a long wig with hair in your mouth. That was awful."

There's an inherently enigmatic aspect to Tool. Do you think a lot of people have misunderstandings about who you are?
"None that I pay attention to. This is the thing that we do. I'm sure it could work better and make us bigger if we did things differently, but this is what we're comfortable doing and this is where we are.

"I was talking to a friend of mine, and we were getting into a gin project, and the company we're talking to is like, 'Yeah, [Maynard], we'll have you do all these things…' Look, dude, [actor and Aviation Gin co-owner] Ryan Reynolds enjoys mingling with people. He's a very enigmatic person. He's Canadian. He's just a nice guy. I'm not a nice guy. I am a concentric weirdo. And I'm uncomfortable in my own skin. I definitely don't like being around a lot of people. It has nothing to do with the people. It has to do with me. So I can't be the guy out doing the kind of things… like Dave Grohl and Ryan Reynolds. I cannot be those people. I can't even fake being those people. So you just have to do what you're comfortable with."

When you're on the road, how do you fill your time offstage?
"There's a million products out there for people having problems singing and all kinds of wives' tales about maintaining your pipes. There's Throat Coat and lemon and honey tea and all that. It really comes down to oxygen, blood flow, just getting your body to be able to heal itself. Water, sleep and shutting the fuck up are the top three for maintaining your voice. But to me, the fourth element is some kind of workout regimen that gets blood flowing through your body. Just being a couch potato and sleeping all day is not good for your throat.

"The show is the number one priority. Being able to pull out that show is the only thing on my plate. So I'm thinking four shows ahead of making sure that I'm ready. You can't have a bunch of spicy food the night before a show or a day of show, or the show's fucked. I have to really pay attention to that stuff."

Is there anything about the early days of the band that you particularly miss?
"When you're first getting going, there's no rules, because nobody knows what they're doing. You're just out there to find your way, and you're shredding and trying different things and feeling your oats.

"But then when you become popular and people start forcing their expectations on what they think you're supposed to be doing, it kind of boxes you in a little bit. We're still stubborn and we're going to do what we're going to do, but it does feel like within the band, you have ideas of, 'Well, this is how we do it, and this is what we do.' It didn't used to be that way."

What do you remember about your very first tour overseas with Tool?
"I managed to get advice on many occasions from Henry Rollins. And one of the best pieces of advice he ever gave me was like, 'Your crew works harder than you are. Don't be a bitch to your crew and don't allow your opening act to be a bitch to your crew. It's not gonna go well.' That was huge. It was just good to have that advice early on, so I didn't step in shit right away. He also mentioned when you go overseas, it's going to be culture shock, and don't be the fucking American going over there. Just listen, learn, pay attention and just don't be that guy."

Were Black Flag especially important to you?
"Absolutely. That whole era of music was incredible. Having seen those guys playing in tiny clubs and just going for it – whether there's one person in the room or a thousand people in the room – the punk rock energy of what was coming from the stage was hugely educational. It was the balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. And for them it was all intrinsic. They had to be on that stage making those noises."

Nobody did that kind of music thinking they were going to play stadiums.
"That was the attitude in the beginning with us. We were just going to do this thing, see where it goes. And then when it started really taking off, I had to make sure that I kept my finger on the pulse of what it means to struggle. Being able to do it up there because you just need to or want to was far more important than anything else. That was a huge lesson."

Tool have now been at this game for 34 years, and there is no act in heavy music that is more formidable, with a deep catalogue of songs featuring muscle and strange emotional resonance. It took creative friction to get there, and lasting commitment to keep it going. For all the disagreements that have emerged about their pace of music-making, audiences seem thankful for the mind-expanding, genre-redefining sounds they have already created and continue to perform live.

None of Tool's members have expressed any doubt about their intentions to create more new music. They each have other projects and the normal distractions in life, but they are never better than when they convene on a stage as Tool. And with a fresh body of work to fuel them, as they stand beneath the seven-pointed heptagram star that hangs overhead, Tool still sound like a band of the future.

TOOL TOUR THE UK FROM MAY 30.
SEE TOOLBAND.COM FOR DATES

BILL HICKS: GLEN COPUS/EVENING STANDARD/SHUTTERSTOCK

THE NEXT GENERATION

This month's cover stars have inspired countless young bands in different ways. Here are five who are using Tool's influence to come up with something new

Hawxx have a voice and they mean to use it

HAWXX

Fire and feminist fury with a progressive metal spirit

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

Teenage rebellion looked very different for Hawxx vocalist and guitarist Anna Papadimitriou.

"Some people join punk bands, shave their heads or take drugs," she says. "My thing was becoming a Christian. I would tell my mum that I was going out clubbing, but actually I'd be going to all-night prayer meetings."

Raised in Athens, Greece as an atheist, in her late teens she joined a Nigerian religious cult.

"I unfortunately got involved with the wrong people," Anna continues. "There was a lot of abuse and corruption, so I was part of the few people that decided to expose that and shut it down. I ended up being the person that they said, 'You were sent by Satan to destroy us all!'"

While Anna is reluctant to get into specifics, she alludes to them on hell-for-leather thrasher *Bite (Holiness In Fuck)*, from Hawxx's 2023 album, *Earth, Spit, Blood And Bones*. It sees Anna screaming the lyrics: *'You defend this myth / You're not living in sin, you're the sin's bitch.'*

It's just one of many experiences fuelling Hawxx's unapologetic wrath. Their blistering progressive metal, which blends rhythmic grooves and visceral hard rock with hooks sharp enough to draw blood, is a turbulent backdrop to a ferocious statement of intent that calls out the

patriarchy, injustice and inequality. The album's lead single, *Death Makes Sisters Of Us All*, rails against male violence. Written following the murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa in 2021, Anna says the band were aiming to turn pain into power.

"I went to Sarah Everard's vigil, and I also went to Sabina's vigil," she explains. "It's a testament to the women that have been named and unnamed, and about rage, our collective rage. But it's more than that, it's also about the sisterhood between women and in the queer community. The grief and rage we share generates this force that is unstoppable."

In 2022, the band played their biggest shows to date supporting Alter Bridge guitarist Mark Tremonti on his solo UK tour. After an adrenaline-fuelled show at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire, Anna received a message from Patsy Stevenson, the activist who had been detained by police at Sarah Everard's Clapham Common vigil.

"She said, 'I just want to say thanks for talking about us and our rights.'"

During the band's gigs, that sense of righteous anger bubbles over into something primal.

"Women and queer people would usually be physically sidelined and sidelined in terms of who the artist speaks to," says Anna. "If you come to a Hawxx show, I want those members of the audience to feel prioritised and centred."

Inspired by bands and peers such as doom punks Witch Fever and post-hardcore quartet Petrol Girls, who are blazing their own abrasive, outspoken trail, Hawxx want to be a voice for change.

"The best pit I've ever been in was at a Petrol Girls show," says Anna. "Me and all these other women were just going for it, and it was more than just cathartic, it was healing. And that made me think, 'God, that's what I want to be doing at our shows, to direct this intensity somewhere specific.'"

"I WANT WOMEN AND QUEER PEOPLE TO FEEL PRIORITISED"

ANNA PAPADIMITRIOU

WE ♥ TOOL

ANNA PAPADIMITRIOU: "They're the wise Godfathers. They've done whatever the fuck they want forever, and it's paid off. They haven't subscribed to any of the things the music industry tells you that you need to do. They are an example to cut out the bullshit, and remember what's important about making music."

***EARTH, SPIT, BLOOD AND BONES* IS OUT NOW**

OU

Enigmatic and unique prog metal from the heart of China

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

China has famously given the world many things during its millennia-long history: paper, gunpowder, banknotes, a great big wall among them. But prog metal? Not so much.

Ou (pronounced 'O') are out to change that. The Beijing four-piece put a unique spin on this most tried-and-tested of genres. Their upcoming second album, *II: Frailty*, combines knotty heaviness and glitchy electronics with ethereal otherworldliness, the latter courtesy of singer Lynn Wu. It's like Tool jamming with Aphex Twin while Björk sings in Mandarin Chinese over the top.

"There's a lot of interesting traditional Chinese instruments and Chinese music," says drummer Anthony Vanacore, Ou's lone American, of the band's magnetic sound. "I haven't borrowed any of that stuff as such, but it's influenced me subconsciously. And Lynn's voice obviously brings a different element to it."

Anthony grew up in New Jersey, falling in love with the culture of his soon-to-be-adopted homeland when he was living in an area with a large Chinese community. The opportunity to tour China with an orchestra in 2009 led to him moving to the city of Guangzhou and, later, Beijing. It was in the Chinese capital where he met Ou guitarist Jing Zhang and bassist Chris Cui. They later asked Lynn to add vocals to the instrumental music they'd written.

"Lynn comes from more of a pop background, she hadn't really heard much metal," says Anthony of the vocalist, who sings in her native Mandarin Chinese. "But the way she approached it just fit like a glove."

Ou's debut album, *one*, was released in 2022. It attracted the attention of Devin Townsend, who co-produced the follow-up ("Seeing how he worked was inspirational," recalls Anthony). The lyrics on *II: Frailty* may be impenetrable to non-Chinese speakers, but the drummer promises English-language translations will be posted on the band's Instagram and YouTube channel.

"It's about the frailty of the human condition and everything that comes with that," he says. "It's pretty universal."

> **"I'M NOT SURE WHAT THIS BAND'S ABOUT. I LIKE THAT IT'S A MYSTERY"**
> ANTHONY VANACORE

As well as planning their very first shows, Ou also have a 10-episode animated online series in the works, based on a cyborg character that shares the band's name. The series will tie in with the themes of the album, albeit loosely.

"I'm a big David Lynch fan," says Anthony, referencing the cult filmmaker. "His approach is: 'Why do we need to be spoon-fed a plot?' I love leaving things open to interpretation. People ask me, 'What is this band about?' And my response is, 'I'm not sure.' I like that it's a mystery to me."

***II: FRAILTY* IS RELEASED ON APRIL 26 VIA INSIDE OUT MUSIC**

WE ♥ TOOL

ANTHONY VANACORE: "I remember when *Ænima* came out, it just blew my mind. It was this rare instance of a band breaking into the commercial world without compromising who they were. There aren't too many bands who have done that."

Ou come with the HevyDevy stamp of approval!

PRESS/ZHANG XIN 张欣

WHEEL

Former acoustic pop-rocker living the prog metal dream

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

Wheel: creatively, they're on a roll...

WE ♥ TOOL

JAMES LASCELLES: "What they do better than anyone is structure and arrangement. The building blocks are very simple but they're put together in extremely interesting ways. They're the best in the world at it."

Life can sometimes take a strange turn. Wheel frontman/guitarist James Lascelles' musical tastes were forever warped when he heard Tool's *Ænima* while working in a studio. Yet despite this early love of heavy music, he would end up in a Finnish acoustic pop-rock band named Flute Of Shame, alongside a former winner of TV contest *Finnish Idols*.

"I didn't enjoy how controlled everything felt in terms of the production of the art itself," the British-born James says now. "I wanted to create things. In Wheel, by contrast, we've got an almost terrifying amount of creative control."

It's working for them. The Anglo-Finnish trio have established themselves as one of the most engrossing new prog metal bands around. Their third album, *Charismatic Leaders*, brings a heavier metallic foundation to Wheel's off-kilter time signatures, elaborate structures and psychedelic edges.

Lyrically, *Charismatic Leaders* is a not-quite-concept album that deals with real-world issues in an often oblique way. James says that while he has been experimenting with more abstract subjects, the song *Empire*, about Rupert Murdoch's media empire, is among the most political he's written so far.

"The whole point of art is to hold up a mirror. Sometimes I'll have an opinion to go with it, but sometimes it's holding a mirror with no fucking idea or answers, just because it needs to be done."

***CHARISMATIC LEADERS* IS OUT ON MAY 3 VIA INSIDE OUT MUSIC**

EVERY HELL

Rising from the ashes of Black Peaks, this is where Tool meet Twenty One Pilots

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

The end of Brighton post-metallers Black Peaks was understandably painful for Will Gardner.

"It hurt for a long time afterwards," says the singer and guitarist of the demise of his former band in 2021. "And lockdown completely drove me insane."

With both of those events receding the rear-view mirror, Will is pouring his energy into Every Hell. Black Peaks are part of the new band's DNA – inevitable, given the presence of both Will and original Peaks bassist Andrew Gosden (the line-up is completed by keyboard player/guitarist Evelyn May and drummer Mark Roberts).

"Having Andrew is a big part of what we're doing," he says. "That heavy bass is at the core of everything."

But Every Hell take Will's old outfit as a jumping-off point to explore different musical avenues – "a continuation and an evolution", as he puts it. The two tracks they've released so far – *Freaking Out* and *The Watcher* – strip back the proggy complexity in favour of a rawer and more direct approach.

"We're inspired by a lot of Converge, Tool, Mastodon, but also [garage rockers] Death From Above 1979 and even Twenty One Pilots," he explains. "It's using melody and pop chord sequences, but playing them in a heavy fashion."

The plan for the immediate future is to drop two more tracks and package them all together as an EP ahead of Every Hell's appearance at Arctangent in August.

"They're more proggy," says Will of the new songs. "Much closer to that Peaks sound. But it's early days. We've only been out in the world for five or six months now, so we're still exploring."

Continuing and evolving: Every Hell is a new chapter for Will Gardner

WE ♥ TOOL

WILL GARDNER: "I hated Tool for fucking years, until *10,000 Days* came out. The first two tracks – *Vicarious* and *Jambi* – just changed my life. I became obsessed with Maynard's voice and the perfection they were aiming for."

WHEEL: PRESS/ANASTASYA KOROL. EVERY HELL: PRESS

Mountain Caller: three musical voices, but a whole world to get lost in

MOUNTAIN CALLER

Post-metal instrumentalists with a sci-fi story to tell

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

The best instrumental acts are adept at using their music to tease out emotions and conjure different atmospheres. London three-piece Mountain Caller go further, with a whole accompanying narrative best described as an epic feminist sci-fi allegory. The recently released *Chronicle II: Hypergenesis* picks up where debut album *Chronicle I: The Truthseeker* left off, with an unnamed protagonist seeking the meaning behind her extraordinary powers. Cue sky libraries, mysterious tomes, a council of owls and a large dose of self-actualisation.

"It taps into the experience of anyone who's marginalised or misunderstood or different. The story is about discovering your unique power… finding beauty in something the world has condemned you for," explains drummer Max Maxwell.

The story plays out through songtitles, musical movements and a certain amount of contextualization, but the band are happy for people to reach their own conclusions.

"We're very keen not to restrict the listener in how they interpret and react to the story. If someone is picturing something in their head, then that's what it is," says Max.

Musically, the band achieve an expansive vision despite their starting palette containing only three instruments and minimal vocals. There are driving metallic riffs aplenty, but these are accompanied by lush, post-metal swirls and atmospheric soundscapes that combine to paint vivid scenes in the mind's eye.

"Because we have only three musical voices to use, we do have to think a little bit differently in how to add a bit of variation. El [Reeve, bass] particularly goes out of her way to not do just what a bassist traditionally does," Max says, adding that he and Claire Simson [guitar] have previously told their bandmate – the only non-Tool fan of the three – that her playing reminds them in some ways of Justin Chancellor's.

"One of my favourite things about Tool is that all four musical voices have a really distinct quality to them," the drummer continues. "It feels like a real band, like a meeting of equal quarters that come together to form this thing that is more than the sum of its parts. I'd like to think that with us it's a similar thing. We each take precedence at different stages. It's a meeting of different individual voices that makes something new when they bounce off each other."

> **"IT TAPS INTO THE EXPERIENCE OF ANYONE WHO IS MISUNDERSTOOD"**
> MAX MAXWELL

***CHRONICLE II: HYPERGENESIS* IS OUT NOW VIA CHURCH ROAD**

WE ♥ TOOL

MAX MAXWELL: "I love the crescendos Tool build – it takes you into another world. At the end of *The Patient*, in *Vicarious* and *10,000 Days…*, there are so many points where they build up to this huge release. People think of them as very cerebral but they're visceral and primal as well."

PRESS/TOM LE BON

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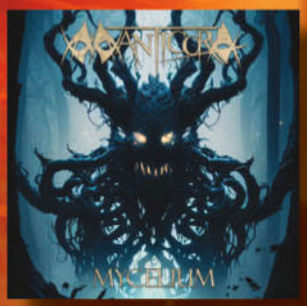

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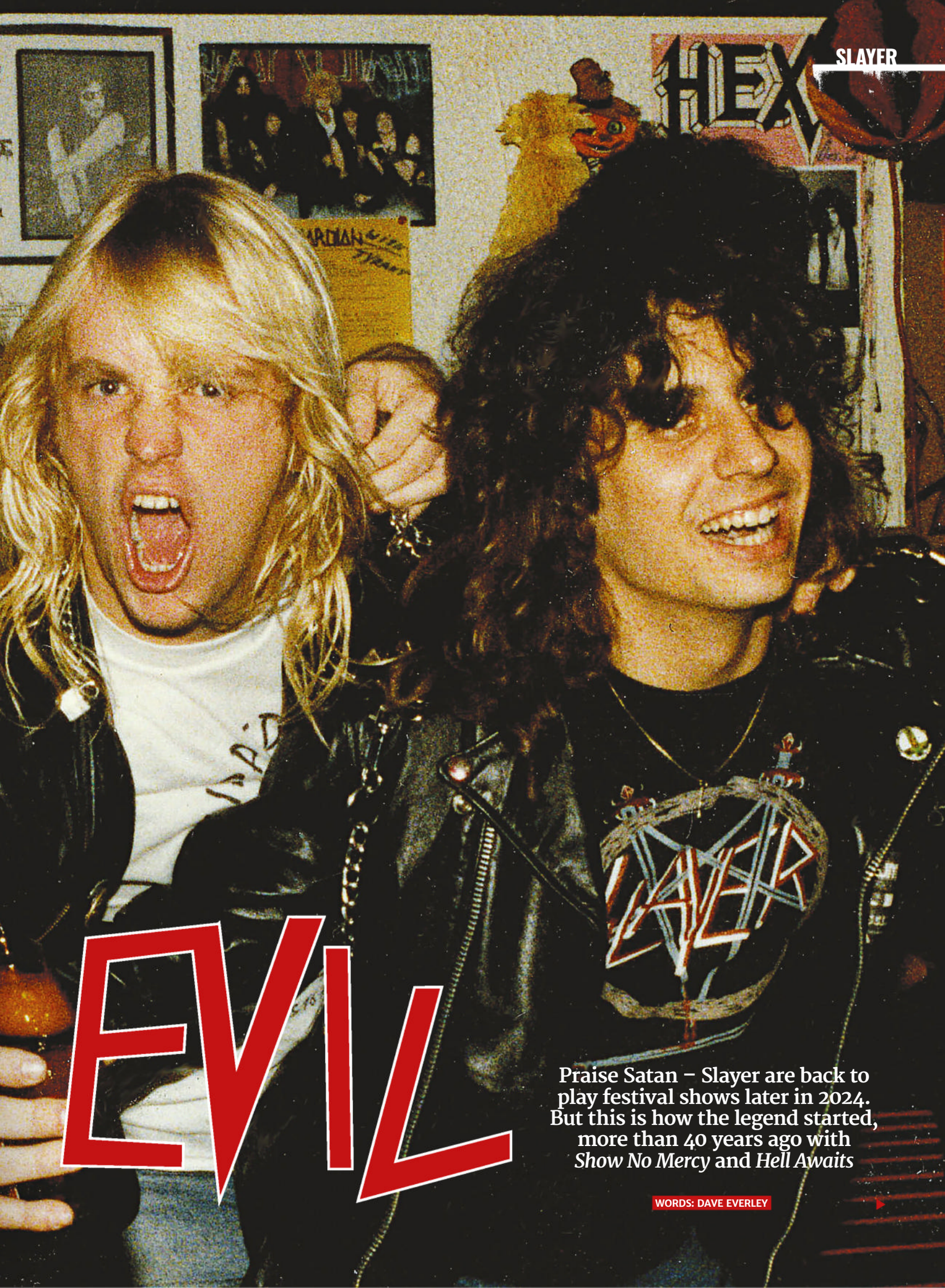


EVIL

Praise Satan – Slayer are back to play festival shows later in 2024. But this is how the legend started, more than 40 years ago with *Show No Mercy* and *Hell Awaits*

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

The first time Metal Blade Records founder Brian Slagel saw Slayer is burned on his brain like a pentagram.

"They were opening for Bitch, which is one of the original bands we ended up signing, in Anaheim," he says now. "There were a bunch of bands opening for them, none of whom I knew. One of those bands happened to be Slayer, and they were amazing. I could see there was something special about them."

It was July 1983. Slayer had been in existence for little over 18 months, and they were yet to fully unfurl their black wings. But that gig set off a chain of events that started with a blown-away Brian releasing one of their songs on one of his legendary *Metal Massacre* compilations, and ended, 36 years later, with Slayer taking their bows at their last ever gig in November 2019, having long ago secured their place among metal's all-time great bands.

Except that final show wasn't so final after all. Just five years after they hung up their inverted crosses, Slayer blindsided everybody by announcing they were reuniting for a series of festival appearances in late 2024.

"Have I missed playing live? Absolutely," said guitarist Kerry King. "Slayer means a lot to our fans; they mean a lot to us."

That news, unexpected but not unwelcome, adds another chapter to a story that stretches back to the suburbs of Los Angeles and Orange County 43 years ago. From their first gigs in tiny venues to helping lay the foundations for thrash metal, this is how that story started.

The 16-year-old Kerry King met his future bandmate Tom Araya when they were both members of a covers band called Quits in 1981. When that band fell apart, the guitarist began plotting his next move.

Kerry King (guitarist): "I was still in high school. I wasn't the youngest one – Dave was the youngest one."

Tom Araya (vocalist/bassist): "My life consisted of school, helping my dad, and wanting to play music."

Kerry: "I found Jeff auditioning for another band in some warehouse. I came out from a try-out for this other band, knowing I didn't want to do it. I come out and Jeff's playing songs I know on a guitar, sitting at the desk. I'm like, 'Hey, are you in a band?' And he wasn't."

Jeff Hanneman (guitarist): "Kerry and I started jamming some Priest songs. That's when he goes, 'Hey, you wanna start a band?' and I was like, 'Fuck yeah!'"

Kerry: "The first time I met Dave was out the front of my house. He walked up and said, 'Hey, you the guy with all the guitars?' I said, 'I have guitars. I don't know what '*all* the guitars' means.'"

Dave Lombardo (drummer): "Kerry gave me a list of songs that he knew on guitar, and I was impressed, because the list was really long. I knew a bunch of them, so he brought his amp over the next day and we started playing. A few rehearsals later, he brought Jeff over."

Tom: "I got a call from Kerry: 'Hey, I'm putting together a band, I got this guitarist and drummer, want to get together and jam?'"

Kerry: "I was big-time into Venom. I thought Cronos was the single most evil entity I'd ever seen in my life!"

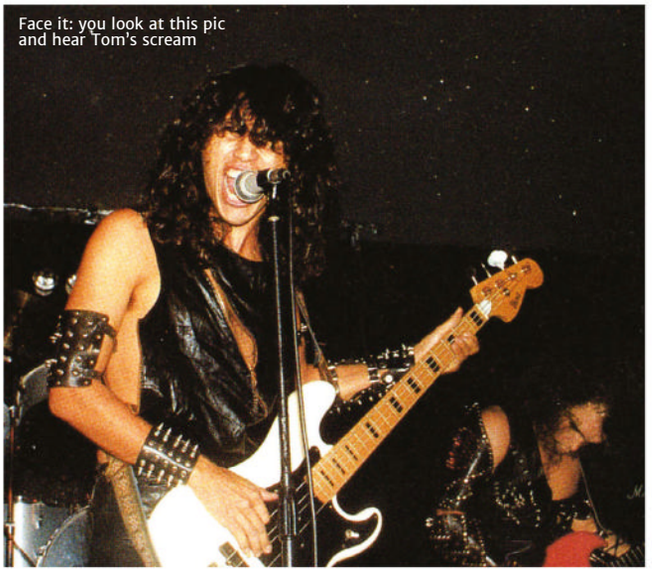
Tom: "We started writing songs at our second practice. I remember Jeff was like, 'I've got this song…'

Dave: "One day Jeff shows up to rehearsal with a shaved head. We were all like, 'Whoa, Jeff, what'd you do?!' He went: 'I'm punk. It's over.' And he brought all of this music with him – Black Flag, TSOL, Minor Threat, Dead Kennedys, Circle Jerks…"

Jeff: "Dave jumped on the punk bandwagon right away, but it took Kerry and Tom a little while longer. Eventually, our songs just started getting faster and faster."

Tom: "It started with the song *Aggressive Perfector*. We rehearsed it 100 times. And we liked it so much, we rewrote a lot of originals that we had. That'd be the one time we said: 'This is the direction we're going in.' Prior to that, we didn't know what we wanted to do. We just did it!"

Kerry rocking the raccoon look


Face it: you look at this pic and hear Tom's scream

Dave Lombardo taking it all out on his kit

Jeff makes Slayer's allegiances clear

METAL BLADE RECORDS

Slayer were determined to push the boundaries... and they succeeded

"METALLICA AND SLAYER WERE IN A RACE"

BRIAN SLAGEL

This new band, christened Slayer, played their first ever show at South Gate Park Auditorium, Los Angeles on Halloween 1981. The Sunset Strip was LA's centre of musical gravity at the time, with bands such as Ratt, Dokken and the newly formed Mötley Crüe the scene's rising stars. It was everything Slayer stood against.

Kerry: "Hollywood was more hair metal and we played more in Orange County, where there was more of a metal stronghold. There weren't any rivalries, because I felt superior to all of those bands. Hair metal was remedial music to me."

Tom: "We had black eyeliner: we didn't want to look like girls, we wanted to look like guys putting on bad make-up. We wanted to be so far from what Hollywood was."

Kerry: "We sort of exiled ourselves to Anaheim [in Orange County, an hour's drive south of LA itself].

Dave: "We did everything in our power to promote ourselves when we were first starting out. For our light show, we would bring our own lights because we were Slayer. We brought in our smoke and pyro… We were determined."

An early flyer: "If you cherish your sanity, this band is not for you. Slayer is out to warp your brain, move your feet and raise your spirits. Their weapon: pure ass kickin' rock and roll."

Kerry: "A friend was sure he if could get some music to Brian Slagel, he would at least offer the band a spot on a *Metal Massacre* album."

Brian Slagel: "That first time I saw them, they didn't play a long set, and half of their songs were covers, but they were really heavy and intense. I went backstage and talked to this guy who was managing them, Steven Craig, and said, 'I do these *Metal Massacre* compilations, I'd love to have the band on if they could record a track.' I later found out they were trying to get on the record, but they didn't say so at the time."

Kerry: "The entire band was super-stoked and scared to death. Now what? Completely uncharted territory."

Aggressive Perfector was the opening track on the *Metal Massacre III* compilation, released in the autumn of 1983. Metallica's *Hit The Lights* had been a jolt of energy on the original *Metal Massacre* album the previous year, but this was something else: meaner and more malevolent.

Kerry: "Metallica paved the way. We played with them at Woodstock [Concert Theatre in Anaheim, in October 1982] – that was with Mustaine on guitar. They were probably six months ahead of us."

Lars Ulrich (Metallica drummer): "The place we played with them was kind of a local hole in the wall. They weren't *Angel Of Death* Slayer yet, but they were on their way, certainly. And you could definitely feel that this was a musical force to be reckoned with."

Brian: "It wasn't like they came out of the woodwork and got really big straight away. But I did notice that every time I saw them, they got better, they had more original songs, they started to have better production at the shows."

Gene Hoglan (Death Angel drummer): "I was a 15-year-old kid at the time, and I remember seeing this band Slayer around a little bit. They did covers of Priest and Maiden and Deep Purple songs. But then I went to see a band called St. Valentine at the Troubadour in Hollywood and Slayer were on the bill. It was like, 'Oh my God, this is the greatest thing I've seen.' I saw them play songs that they never even recorded. There was a song called *Night Rider*, there was *Assassin*, there was *Ice Titan*."

Brian: "The four guys didn't really hang around a lot with ▶

METAL BLADE RECORDS

Not-so-pretty in pink

each other offstage, they weren't super-friendly. But clearly it worked. Once they got onstage or in the studio, it was magical."

In October 1983, Slayer entered Track Studios in LA to record their debut album, *Show No Mercy*, with engineer Bill Metoyer and Brian Slagel acting as producer. Recorded in just 10 days, songs such as *Evil Has No Boundaries, Black Magic* and *The Antichrist* positioned Slayer as LA's evil-est band.
Brian: "*Show No Mercy* cost $3,000 to record. It was mostly Tom who paid for it, 'cos he was the one with a job [working as a respiratory therapist]."
Kerry: "On your first album, you emulate your heroes. You can definitely hear the Maiden influences and the Priest influences on *Show No Mercy*."
Brian: "They had rough ideas about a lot of stuff, but they were kind of piecing it together… coming up with these incredible ideas, putting together these songs in the studio."
Gene: "I'd gotten to know the guys in the band well, and I was in the studio while they recorded *Show No Mercy*. I remember literally sitting at Tom's feet while he tracked [recorded] *Tormentor*. He's barking out his vocals directly in front of me."
Kerry: "When people come up and talk to us about the Church Of Satan and stuff, I'm like, 'You're talking to the wrong dude. You might want King Diamond.' I'm an atheist – I don't believe in either of them [God or Satan]. I tried writing a song about atheism but the dark, Satanic-inspired songs are more compelling."
Gene: "I think Tom invented the death metal vocal style with the *'watch as flowers decay'* line [from *Show No Mercy* track *Die By The Sword*]. Nobody had ever sung that low before. Suddenly everybody started doing it."
Brian: "It wasn't like the record came out and all of a sudden they're really big. It took quite a while to get some notoriety. Especially in Europe. The bigger magazines in the UK were not fans."
Kerry: "Oh, people hated us. But hey, I liked it. It doesn't matter what critics say. It never did."

Slayer and Megadeth partying backstage at Brooklyn's L'Amour in 1984

Show No Mercy was released on December 3, 1983 via Metal Blade. Soon after, Slayer ventured up the coast to San Francisco's Bay Area – at the time, the cradle of the nascent, if still unchristened thrash metal scene, thanks in part to the arrival of LA refugees Metallica.
Brian: "They went up there the first time and played Ruthie's Inn, which was this legendary venue. The reaction was really good – they fitted in with that whole scene up there – Exodus, Metallica, all that early thrash stuff."
Gary Holt (Exodus guitarist): "Someone got us a tape of *Show No Mercy*, and we were like, 'These guys are just like us, this is crazy! We want to kill shit and hack things up with machetes with them!'"
Brian: "The Bay Area people were not fans of the make-up that Slayer were wearing at all. The Exodus guys were really making fun of them after the show: 'What are you guys doing?' They were grilling them really hard. I think that's when and why they took the make-up off."
Gene: "There was one show where James Hetfield was in the front row, 'banging all the time and going crazy. And then they played [Venom's] *Witching Hour* as the encore and he just stood there with his arms folded, shaking his head. It's like, 'Come on man, Metallica aren't the only Venom clones.'"
Brian: "Metallica and Slayer didn't really have that much of a relationship, but they were both interested in what the

MAIN: METAL BLADE RECORDS. INSET: KEVIN HODAPP/FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY

other was doing. Whenever I'd hang out with Metallica, they'd go, 'What does this new Slayer stuff sound like? How fast is it?' And vice versa with Slayer. They were in a covert race to see who could write the heavier, faster album."
Gene: "Metallica was leading the way, but Slayer to me was a much better band."

Slayer were still a grassroots proposition, but it felt like something was happening for them. But they hit a bump in the road in early 1984 when ex-Metallica guitarist Dave Mustaine tapped up Kerry to play in his new band, Megadeth.
Dave Mustaine: "When I first met Kerry, he and I became friends. He played with Megadeth for a short while when we were a three-piece and looking for another guitarist."
Jeff: "I thought Kerry was an ass for doing that. I remember talking to Tom about it, like, 'I guess we're gonna get a new guitar player.'"
Kerry: "I played five shows [with Megadeth]. Dave wanted me to stay around, but I didn't have any reason to stay around because I had Slayer."
Gene: "I saw those shows. Kerry was wearing a t-shirt that said 'Paid Assassin.' He was saying, 'Dude, I'm just sitting in here.'"
Brian: "I personally didn't get the feeling that Kerry was going to leave, 'cos there was so much going on with Slayer at that point. But I would be lying if I didn't say that there was a part of me that was a little worried: 'What if this goes really well, what if Kerry wants to stay there?' Was I relieved when he came back? Yeah, a little bit."
Gene: "They had these new songs, which would end up on the *Haunting The Chapel* EP. Boy, they were praising some Satan with that one."
Brian: "The songs on *Haunting The Chapel* were even better than the stuff they had on *Show No Mercy*."
Tobias Forge (Ghost): "I like the weird signature at the start of *Haunting The Chapel*. Slayer were so gnarly back then. They did the most evil riffs ever, and there was something genuinely hostile about them. There's not one happy note in there."
Gene: "I remember reading in a magazine where [Mötley Crüe bassist] Nikki Sixx reviewed *Haunting The Chapel*. He said, 'This is the worst pile of shit I've ever heard. The guitars sound like buzzsaws. This is effing terrible.' I was like, '*You're* terrible. Who are Mötley Crüe anyway?'"

Kerry King at L'Amour in December 1984

"SLAYER WERE SO GNARLY BACK THEN"
GHOST'S TOBIAS FORGE

The *Live Undead* EP followed in late 1984, but it was Slayer's second full-length album, 1985's *Hell Awaits*, that truly marked out their greatness. It stripped away any vestiges of cheese that had clung to its predecessor, offering up a set of gimlet-eyed songs that were demonic in sound and intent. This was the birth of Slayer as the world would come to know them.
Brian: "We actually had a budget at this point. We wanted to bring in someone who could help take their sound to another level, which was [engineer] Ron Fair. He was an awesome guy – loved metal, loved the scene. Years later, he went on to do stuff with Christina Aguilera and Lady Gaga. But he'd always tell people, 'I did Slayer too…'"
Kerry: "On that album we were in our Mercyful Fate stage… all the songs are nine years long!"
Tom: "We recorded *Hell Awaits* and it was slow, and demonic. There were other bands that were coming out with that kind of style… that demonic voice and heavy sound."
Kerry: "Even though we were still getting shitty reviews, people started coming to shows."
Brian: "That album got everybody's attention. Major labels were all over them at that point. I was sort of managing the band and we were taking meetings with all the major labels."
Rick Rubin: "To some people, they'd look at [Slayer's music and lyrics] as negative content, and then I'd go to a concert and see an arena full of kids who were very much like the guys in Slayer, who were so filled with joy listening to this music. It was speaking directly to them. It completely was nourishing them. *Kumbaya* would not have reached them."
Brian: "I met [Def Jam Records founder] Rick Rubin in New York; he was telling me how much he loved Slayer. At that point Def Jam was still a rap label, but I was super-impressed with what he was saying. It got super-crazy and Rubin swept in and signed them. That's when they made *Reign In Blood*."
Gene: "To me, those first two Slayer albums were the heaviest albums ever recorded at the time. The music was so over the top, so heavy, their mystique was amazing."
Brian: "None of us in that scene ever expected any of this stuff to happen to any of these bands. We were just young kids getting this music out there. Slayer were one of the bands that started that scene. They helped drive a truck through everything, then a bunch of other bands came through after them." H

SLAYER PLAY THE RIOT FEST, LOUDER THAN LIFE AND AFTERSHOCK FESTIVALS IN THE US THIS YEAR

KEVIN HODAPP/FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY. ADDITIONAL SOURCES: JOEL MCIVER – THE BLOODY REIGN OF SLAYER, DECIBEL, REVOLVER, ROLLING STONE

"THE WORLD IS

They rose to fame in the 2000s before vanishing in the 2010s. Now the rejuvenated Kittie are back with a fearsome new album, and they're making up for lost time

READY FOR US NOW"

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

On a blisteringly hot day at 2023's Sick New World festival in Las Vegas, a huge crowd await Kittie's arrival. In the throng, rabid Gen Z-ers, ready to witness the reunited Canadian band for the first time, jostle for position amid 30- and 40-somethings who were on the nu metal front lines the first time around.

Moments later, Kittie appear. A squall of feedback and slashed guitar chords announce set opener *I've Failed You*, and vocalist and guitarist Morgan Lander lets out a shriek that could strip varnish from wood. "And then," says Mercedes Lander, Kittie's drummer and Morgan's sister, "people lost their fucking minds."

Almost a year on, there's a sense that Morgan and Mercedes have been caught off guard by the fervour surrounding their reunion. Brutal new single *Eyes Wide Open* prompted a burst of excitement when it was released in February, while *Fire*, their first album in 13 years, will land later this year.

"We're just sort of along for the ride," admits Morgan with a smile. She and her sister are speaking via Zoom from their respective houses in their hometown of London, Ontario. "The response has been overwhelmingly positive. That's just something I really didn't think was going to happen. I'm shocked at how amazing and welcoming everybody is again."

The surprise is somewhat understandable. When Kittie released their 1999 debut, *Spit*, they were four teenage girls at the height of nu metal's dick-swinging reign; they broke the mould. They were heavier and went harder than most of their peers, incorporating thrash and death metal into their thick, chunky sound. Their debut single, *Brackish*, became an instant nu metal classic, a feminist anthem in a sea of male bravado. The song propelled them to MTV, Ozzfest and a support slot on Slipknot's first US headline tour.

"A lot of the shows that we did with them were completely out of control," says Morgan. "The crowds were just seething, the fire alarms were getting pulled, and there was sweat dripping from the ceilings."

Yet it was a momentum they would struggle to maintain. The band were savvy enough not to anchor themselves to nu metal, incorporating even more extreme influences on subsequent albums, but after the scene keeled over around 2003, Kittie found themselves struggling with diminishing returns and changing line-ups. The Lander sisters eventually put the band on ice in 2011, embarking on their own individual careers inside and outside of music. Aside from a single hometown reunion show in 2017, featuring three different sets played by three different line-ups, it seemed like Kittie were history. Until now.

"I just think that the world is ready for us now," Morgan says. "A lot of the things that we were doing 25 years ago were still… I don't want to say controversial, but they seemed so new. It definitely has a lot to do with a shift in thinking and acceptance and representation in the years since the very first time that Kittie came out. Sometimes it just takes the world a bit of time to catch up and appreciate those things."

The duo pinpoint Sick New World as the moment Kittie's revival really kicked into gear, but they were back before that, having played their first gig in five years at Virginia's Blue Ridge Rock Festival in September 2022, and Las Vegas emo extravaganza When We Young a month later. But Sick New World, they say, was their crowd: an audience there to bask in the glow of nu metal's recent rebirth.

It's a sharp contrast with their memories of the end of the band's original run. There was no acrimonious implosion or bitter fistfights. Instead, the final days of the band were quiet, sad, inevitable. Following the release of their 2011 album, *I've Failed You*, they hit the road armed with what they believed was their most accomplished work, only for it to be greeted by apathy.

Kittie circa *Spit* (left to right): Morgan Lander, Talena Atfield, Mercedes Lander and Fallon Bowman

"I think the best way to describe it is we just sort of overstayed our welcome," says Morgan. "We were doing a lot of headlining shows, constantly touring, and never really seemed to gain much footing or interest."

The reality that the band was coming to an end took a while to accept. They continued to sweat it out on the road, criss-crossing the USA in a small van, but they were becoming more and more demoralised show by show.

"There were some nights on some of those tours in the very last few years where 50 people would show up to a show," says Morgan. "That's a hard thing as an artist to grapple with. I do remember having conversations where it was like, 'I don't feel like I can do this anymore. I need to try new things.'"

The low points, they insist, brought them closer together. Rather than arguing or infighting, they came together to make the best of the situation. And then…

"We just kind of backed up into the shadows," shrugs Morgan. "There was never a grand announcement that we'd decided to go on a hiatus. We just stopped doing stuff. And I think that in doing that, it didn't put a finality on everything, but at the same time, it was almost like nobody really noticed for a little while."

GETTY

In the intervening years, the band retreated to what Morgan describes as "common and mundane, normal lives". She and Mercedes remained close, living nearby and seeing each other on a regular basis, even working together at the same software company.

"It ends up that one of us starts working somewhere and then we somehow get the other hired," says Morgan with a laugh.

Both sisters dipped their toes in and out of music over the 2010s. Mercedes formed post-metal band White Swan, while Morgan joined melodic death metal outfit Karkaos as singer in 2019, but they never quite shut the book on Kittie. In 2017, they released the crowdfunded documentary, *Kittie: Origins/Evolutions*, which included interviews with previous bandmembers, looking back over their career.

"I feel like the door has always been left ajar," says Mercedes. "We all kind of knew that if this was something that was ever going to be a thing again, that we could always hop back in and I'm sure it would be like we never stopped."

Morgan continues: "For Mercedes and I especially, this band is so acutely tied to our identity and who we are. Kittie could never do anything again, and we would still be Kittie. Kittie would still run in our blood."

"WE JUST BACKED UP INTO THE SHADOWS"

MERCEDES LANDER

"WE TOOK NO PRISONERS!"

Every Kittie album in the Lander sisters' own words

SPIT (1999)
Kittie's debut album was a dirty, deafening howl of teenage angst, with a genuine anthem of female empowerment in breakout single *Brackish*. "It's probably considered a nu metal classic now," says Morgan. "But *Spit* was just a bunch of young people really figuring it all out."

ORACLE (2001)
Tired of being pigeonholed as a nu metal band, Kittie leaned into their extreme metal influences on their second album. "*Oracle* was the complete antithesis of *Spit*," explains Mercedes. "It was laser-focused. We wanted to put out the heaviest record we could."

UNTIL THE END (2004)
The sound of a band switching gears and playing around with melody, with uneven results. "I would say there are a lot of great songs on that album, but sonically it's not my favourite," Mercedes agrees. "But we laid the foundations of who we have become as a band."

FUNERAL FOR YESTERDAY (2007)
The brightest and most accessible album of their career. *Funeral For Yesterday* showed a different side to Kittie, although the band were unhappy with the "over-produced" final result. "The songwriting is some of our best," says Mercedes. "But it definitely doesn't sound the way I'd like it to sound."

IN THE BLACK (2009)
After a couple of shaky records, Kittie hit a new groove on *In The Black*. *My Plague* and *Cut Throat* oozed confidence, tight melodies and thrashing, inventive guitars. The result was their best album. "We were coming back and taking no prisoners," says Mercedes.

I'VE FAILED YOU (2011)
Kittie nailed the balance between accessibility and brutality on *I've Failed You*, adding melody and harmonies to its steely-eyed thrash and death metal. "We took the idea of *In The Black*, and we built a better version of that record," recalls Morgan.

Kittie killing it at Sick New World, when the band's revival really kicked into gear

Do they wish they hadn't left it so long to return?

"No. Sometimes you just really need to step away from a situation in order to be able to appreciate it," replies Mercedes. "I feel like if we had just kept grinding away, that would not have been good for us. For my mental health, our morale as a band. Stepping away and then coming back when the time was clearly right, I feel like it made us appreciate everything so much more, and it makes things that much more special."

It was the nu metal resurgence that breathed life back into Kittie. In 2021, Morgan and Mercedes began receiving offers from promoters for live shows. They got back in the practice room, together at first, before meeting up with the rest of the band, longtime guitarist Tara McLeod and bassist Ivy Jenkins.

"We spent eight months making sure we were getting our chops back up in order to get in front of an audience again," says Morgan. "It had really been so long since we'd played Kittie songs together."

Initially, they say, new music wasn't part of the plan. "When we first started playing shows back in 2022, we were like, 'I'm sure people will stop caring eventually, and then we can go on our merry way'," says Mercedes.

The universe had different plans. Ash Avildsen, owner of powerhouse US label Sumerian, saw them play and offered them a deal.

"He said to us, 'I want to put out a record with you guys'," recalls Mercedes. "And we were like, 'We haven't written anything!'"

Of course, there is a huge emotional, mental and financial gulf between just playing a few shows and writing a new album. And the chasm between releasing an album and taking it out on tour is even wider.

"We all had to talk about how much we're willing to do," says Mercedes.

During discussions, a common ground was reached – the stability and normality of their lives was something to be valued and protected.

"I don't think it's ever been a secret that Kittie will never be a full-time thing for us ever again," Mercedes says. "We are not in a place where we want to tour for nine months out of the year. Our main focus is not to go back out and slug it out on the road and leave our jobs, but I think we're able to find a good balance."

"We are all on the same page, of course," Morgan continues. "And we know, unless some Metallica-sized thing happens, it's just not something that'd be feasible for us because… life, man. But at the end of the day, we want to make sure that the shows that we do play are really special, and the music that we release is very special as well."

That said, there's no doubt the sisters are fiercely proud of *Fire*, and excited about the new chapter it's about to open for the band. Written remotely over an eight-month period, with the band passing ideas back and forth via email, the record was recorded in Nashville with producer Nick Raskulinecz (Foo Fighters, Alice In Chains, Stone Sour and countless others). The first single, *Eyes Wide Open*, is a thrilling jolt of adrenaline, slamming together death metal, filthy grooves and blackened, classic metal influences. It is, say the sisters, a taste of what's to come.

"There's a lot of variety," says Morgan. "I think the kind of variety that you will expect from Kittie. If you listen to the production of *Eyes Wide Open*, that kind of visceral, raw, but very modern sound is prevalent throughout all of the songs. The songwriting is definitely next level."

While the current enthusiasm for nu metal might have provided the perfect conditions for the band to return, the pair insist *Fire* is emphatically not a nu metal album. Any suggestion that their comeback has been timed to chime with renewed interest in the genre is shut us down immediately.

"THIS BAND IS ACUTELY TIED TO OUR IDENTITY"

MORGAN LANDER

"We're not a nu metal band, and we never will be again," says Morgan. "We're not trying to recapture something that is long gone for us. There might be a riff or an idea that harkens back to who we were in the past, but that is married with the more modern ideas of Kittie as well. It's probably the best-sounding album that we've ever recorded. It has its foot in many worlds. I feel like when we were writing this album, there didn't feel like there was anything to prove. So it's definitely heavy and more mature, and the songwriting is incredible."

"I feel like we could have phoned it in and done what people expected us to do, but we've never been that band," adds Mercedes. "We've always defied everything and done our own thing, and I think we're going to continue to do that. And that is the beauty of this band." MH

KITTIE'S NEW ALBUM, *FIRE*, WILL BE RELEASED IN THE SUMMER VIA SUMERIAN

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ICE, ICE BABY!

Having faced tragedy, Frozen Soul write death metal anthems about the coldness of life. But beneath their hardened exterior lies a genuine warmth and an ability to spark joy

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: KEVIN NIXON

THANKS TO ICE RINK CANARY WHARF, LONDON

MAGIC
The Gathering
BOLT THROWER
THANK
24

It's not every day you see a death metal bassist slide past you on ice skates, holding onto a three-foot-tall plastic penguin for dear life – but Frozen Soul are a band obsessed with ice. Since they formed six years ago, the five-piece from Dallas, Fort Worth have released two albums: *Crypt Of Ice* (2021) and *Glacial Domination* (2023). Their artwork depicts dead bodies and/or blood frozen amid wintry tundras, and they even wield a smoke machine at their shows to spray their audiences with 'snow'. However, as *Hammer* are finding out today, this lot are also fucking terrified of ice.

Given Frozen Soul's frosty imagery, we thought it'd be fun to take them skating at Ice Rink Canary Wharf in London, ahead of the gig they're playing at the Underworld tonight as part of their European tour. However, of the four of them (guitarist Michael Munday isn't here today – he's skipping the dates due to a house move), it's only bass player Samantha Mobley who straps on her skates.

"We've got three more weeks of touring," vocalist Chad Green reasons, watching from the barrier. He, guitarist Chris Bonner and drummer Matt Dennard haven't skated since childhood, and the last thing they want are back injuries, especially given they already spend a lot of time squashed into tour bus bunks.

It turns out we were overly optimistic about our own skating abilities and should have sat this one out, too. By the time *Hammer* actually gets two skates onto the ice, we're waddling off again so the band can do the photoshoot you see on these pages. Chad, Chris and Matt sensibly wear crampons on their shoes, to minimise the risk of going arse over tit. Why didn't we think of that? Even with other skaters flying past, paying no notice – spinning, gliding backwards and even jumping – we tell ourselves it's OK, as we haven't skated in 17 years. It's a moment of self-assurance that gets flung out the window the second Samantha swings by and tells us that she hasn't done this in 27 years. Even clinging to the penguin-shaped skating aid as she moves around the rink, she's putting the rest of us to shame.

"SOMETIMES LIFE IS ABOUT BEING WARM TO PEOPLE WHO NEED IT"

CHAD GREEN

After the photoshoot, everybody's hurried off the rink, a Zamboni primed to resurface the ice and ready it for the next, far more talented, batch of skaters. As the five of us cram into a black cab bound for the Underworld, we feel the need to ask: why the hell are they so fixated on ice? Although they skated intermittently as kids, it's clearly not a pastime that's endured into adult life. Plus, let's be honest, their home state of Texas isn't exactly known for being a winter wonderland.

"Honestly, the ice thing came as a way to lean into the name of the band," Chad shrugs, once we're settled on Frozen Soul's tour bus in Camden. "When we finally figured the name out, we asked, 'How do you keep going with it?' I've always been a fan of bands like Kiss and Slipknot, because I appreciate the show."

Frozen Soul's name appears as a lyric in Metallica's *Ride The Lightning* track, *Trapped Under Ice* (*'Frozen soul, frozen down to the core!'*), but Chad also traces the moniker back to a time he, Samantha and Michael were listening to obscure extreme metal demos on YouTube together. One of them, by Swedish thrash band Mezzrow, was titled *Frozen Soul*.

Chad's relationship with rock'n'roll dates back many years. Before he was born and during his early childhood, his grandparents ran Fort Worth rock bar Savvy's, which was frequented by the likes of Pantera.

"I've been told I tried to play Vinnie Paul's drum set and got yelled at when I was super-, super-tiny," the vocalist remembers.

It was there that his parents met, his mum working as a waitress and his dad doing security. Although Chad grew up in a supportive household with his mum, grandparents and two younger brothers (Josh and Cory), he acknowledges parts of it were difficult. His dad, he says, was a heroin addict who's spent 30 years in prison.

"He's out of prison now, but he's not in my life," Chad explains. "He was the guy that would get us Christmas presents and then would sneak in and steal them back to pawn them afterwards. I ignore his calls every other day."

Later, Chad's mum passed away after developing diabetes from medication she was taking, and, during the writing of *Glacial Domination*, Cory died of a drug overdose. The vocalist explains that hardships like these, endured by both him and those close to him, have also shaped Frozen Soul's iconography.

"Life is cold, man," he says. "Sometimes you gotta be cold too. But sometimes it's about being warm, to people who need it, to friends and family. Our music is about all of that stuff. It's easier to go in and out of it in a funny sense than in a serious sense."

Chad has always found solace in escapism, fantasy and the theatrical. Not only does he adore the larger-than-life performances of Kiss and Slipknot, as a kid, he was a big gamer and played with Yu-Gi-Oh! cards. Then, as a grown-up, he got into fantasy card game Magic: The Gathering. The singer and Michael, his future guitarist, bonded over a shared appreciation of Magic and metal, then became colleagues in a Magic shop and, eventually, co-founded Frozen Soul.

Chad says they didn't intentionally take inspiration from the immersive worlds of videogames and Magic, but it's hard not to draw parallels.

"I wouldn't say there is a deliberate connection, but there's always a connection between what we do in this band and the things we love," he smiles. "We're all *huge* into videogames! This, for us, is a journey just like in any game. We are on a campaign!"

Michael introduced Chad to brutal death metal bands such as Suffocation, while the singer opened his bandmate up to more old-school, bouncy death metal, such as Obituary and Bolt Thrower, as well as hardcore. All three play their part in Frozen Soul's music, which frequently decelerates from blistering speed to hammering, vintage grooves. It's a mixture that piqued the interest of Trivium leader Matt Heafy, who ended up producing *Glacial Domination*.

"I guess his manager mentioned to ours that he was a big fan of what we were doing and enjoyed our band," Chad says of the hook-up. "Matt's taught me a lot about warming up, and I think what we gained the most from him was patience. He had this opinion of, like, 'You guys do what you want to do. As long as you're doing what you want and you love it, others will love it.'"

He was correct. *Glacial Domination* dropped last May, and Frozen Soul are now on their first European headlining tour. A run of shows supporting melodeath giants Amon Amarth across the States, alongside Cannibal Corpse and Obituary, will follow in April. The "campaign", as Chad described it, is going excellently.

"Part of the reason that Frozen Soul are successful is that our theme transcends a lot of things and a lot of situations," he says. "It's rare in life that something like that happens, and it fucking worked out for this band!"

When we see them onstage later that night, it certainly looks that way. Between songs, the frontman makes speeches championing mental health, thanks the crowd for "taking care" of them, and pays tribute to Cory, adding an emotional weight to the savage riffing. The Underworld is heaving and, at Chad's command, the audience opens a circle-pit around a column at the heart of the venue.

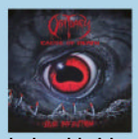
Life is indeed cold but, thanks to Frozen Soul, London is feeling the warmth.

***GLACIAL DOMINATION* IS OUT NOW VIA CENTURY MEDIA**

Frozen Soul (left to right): Chris Bonner, Chad Green, Matt Dennard, Samantha Mobley

FROZEN SOUL MATHS

Chad Green reveals the albums that shaped their sound



OBITUARY
CAUSE OF DEATH *(1990)*
"I don't have a specific story with Obituary but, for me, they are one of those bands that helped bridge the gap between death metal and hardcore."

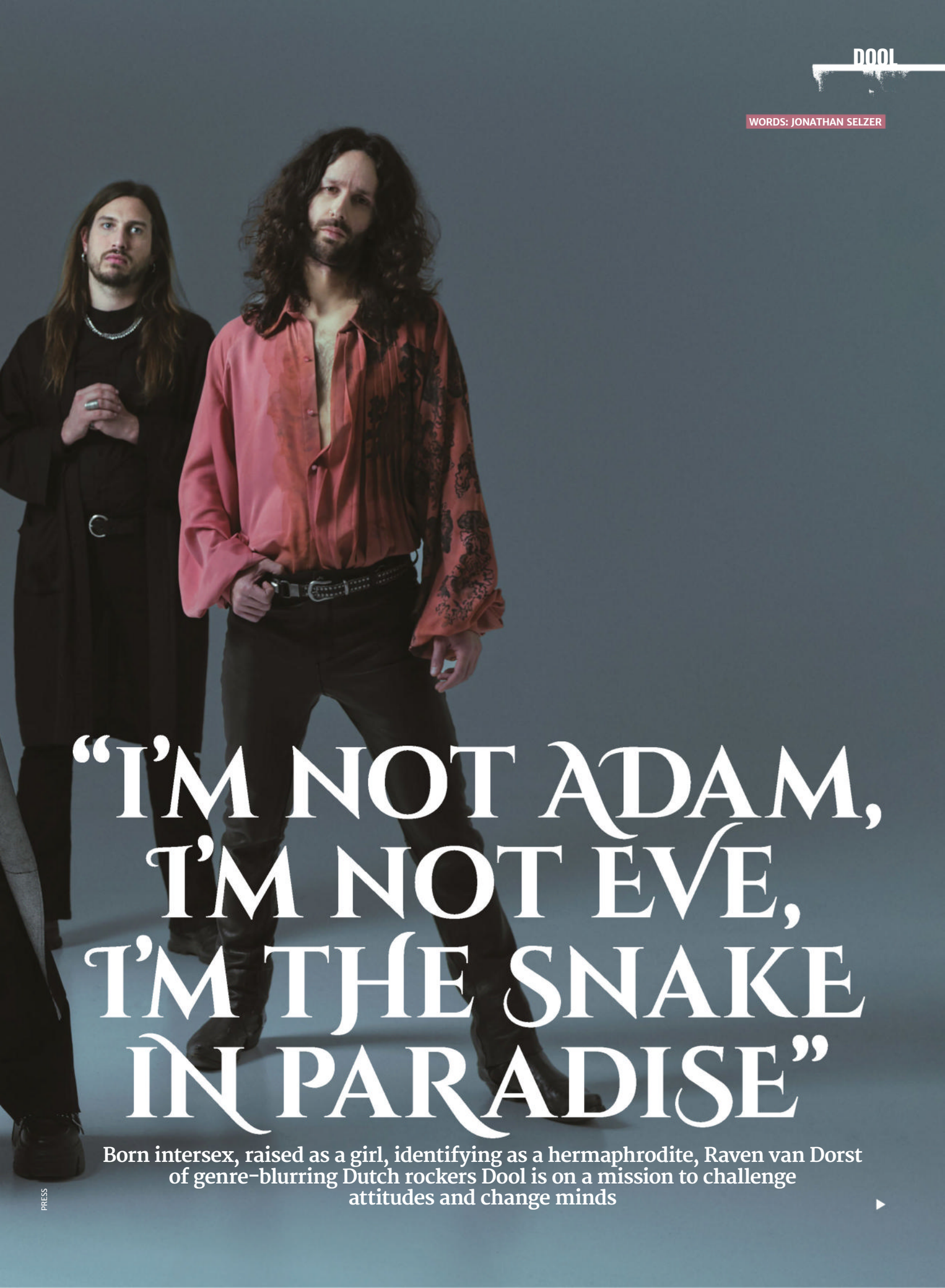
+

MORTICIAN
HACKED UP FOR BARBECUE *(1997)*
"With Mortician, it's less about the blastbeats and stuff, and more about the heavy parts. We look to them for inspiration, because they just have this chug that is super-groovy."

+

BOLT THROWER
MERCENARY *(1998)*
"The song *Mercenary*, the riff that hits after the melodic intro, that's the whole reason this band started. I was captivated by that groove and captivated by when Karl's [Willetts] vocals come in."

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER



"I'M NOT ADAM, I'M NOT EVE, I'M THE SNAKE IN PARADISE"

Born intersex, raised as a girl, identifying as a hermaphrodite, Raven van Dorst of genre-blurring Dutch rockers Dool is on a mission to challenge attitudes and change minds

PRESS

When Raven van Dorst was an unruly, rebellious 20-year-old, a chance doctor's visit led to a revelation. Raven found out they were born intersex – a true hermaphrodite with fused male and female characteristics: externally, chromosomally, psychologically. With the consent of their parents, the doctors had made Raven undergo surgery at birth, removing their male organs. Throughout their childhood and teens, and brought up as a girl with the name Ryanne, they were never told their true nature.

As a child who'd always felt uncomfortable with gender norms, constantly told by teachers to act like a girl even though they'd tell anyone who'd listen that they weren't, the news came with a mix of emotions: relief that their intuition had been right, and a sense of betrayal towards their parents who had kept such fundamental knowledge a secret.

"I felt very disconnected from my family for a long time," Raven says now. "It wasn't their fault, because they trusted in the doctors. They couldn't Google it like you can now. And ever since then, I've been trying to put things in place like, 'Who am I really? Where do I go from here?' But isn't that life in general? I think everyone has a story like this, maybe not as intense, but everyone has to deal with shit in their past or shit about their body, or their minds."

Raven is speaking from their native Netherlands. Sporting a Type O Negative long-sleeve and a rocker's leather vest that's the other side of the coin to their chic stage presence, they're animated, candid, and driven by a gregarious energy undiminished by the tail-end of a flu.

For the last nine years, the vehicle for Raven's putting of the past, present and future into perspective has been Dool. Formed with bassist Job van de Zande and drummer Micha Haring, both formerly of occult rockers The Devil's Blood, Dool (Dutch for 'wandering') have gone beyond genre trappings, refashioning traces of goth, doom, classic and progressive rock to mark out transformative sonic and emotional territory as distinct as it is mercurial.

"I always try to evolve," says Raven. "Everything that I've done musically in my life so far unlocks new possibilities, because you want to keep exploring. That's what music is for, no? I would be so bored if I would do the same thing every fucking album. We'll never be one of those bands whose first and seventh albums sound the same."

Growing up in Maassluis, near the south-west coast of the Netherlands, the tomboyish Raven was drawn to fellow misfits at school, discovering Nirvana and Slayer in their early teens, before finding a community of squatters, punks and metalheads. After briefly joining all-girl pop-rock band Bad Candy as guitarist in 2004 at the insistence of their mother, the role felt too constricting, and Raven found a closer connection to the punk scene – first as a member of pop-punk band The Riplets, and later with garage punks Anne Frank Zappa.

Raven's first band in the wake of the knowledge of their hermaphrodite nature was a solo project under the name Elle Bandita, not only a reaction to the normative feminine roles that had been forced upon them, but with the raunchily hyperactive track *Ubersex*, the stirrings of a coming to terms with their identity.

"At that point, I had only just found out and I made a joke out of it in a way," Raven says. "It wasn't until later that I started to realise what it actually meant to me. I was still young and I found a whole lot of other stuff very important, like partying and being angry at everyone. I was a punk with a very big mouth. It wasn't until later that I felt the emotional impact that it had on me. It was a *process*, but I lost a lot of the anger. I became more at peace with myself and my history. So I started to look a bit more ahead, to reclaim the right to be Raven, the intersex person, the hermaphrodite. I've made a strong fist to get that birthright back."

When The Devil's Blood rhythm section joined, Elle Bandita underwent its own transformation into Dool, and with it came a new personal and musical outlook. One that Raven describes as "less aggressive and angry at the world, and more like 'how can I teach myself to fit into this world,' trying to analyse yourself in what way you are participating in society and in the world".

"I WAS AWARE OF THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT I HAD"

Where Dool's first two albums, 2017's *Here Now, There Then* and 2020's *Summerland*, found Raven – still calling themselves Ryanne – alluding to that birthright through allegory and metaphor, the band's latest album, *The Shape Of Fluidity*, is a more head-on examination of what it means to relate to a world without a box to put you in, and the freedom that comes from nonconformity.

More of a collaborative band effort than ever before, with all the trust and vulnerability that entails, and coming after a period of lockdown-induced self-reflection during which Raven let go of their former name Ryanne and divested themselves of binary pronouns, *The Shape Of Fluidity* sees the band embrace a newfound sonic scope and a liberating emotional weight. While you might find passing references to Ghost on the opening *Venus In Flames* or Grave Pleasures' apocalyptic post-punk hedonism on *Evil In You*, the album as a whole sounds like no one else, in the way that genuinely fearless journeys of self-discovery always do.

Like *Summerland*, it's an evolutionary leap, emerging with a fresh set of nerve-endings already tingling in response to the vast new vistas spread out before it. Psychedelic in nature if not in style, gothic in its lantern-in-the-shadows sensibilities, it's an album that maps out internal terrain that sounds like it's being discovered in real time, weaving spidery webs of tension, mammoth grooves and opulent, anthemic riffs around Raven's fervently searching vocals. It's simultaneously a grand narrative suite, an intimate

Raven has reclaimed their birthright and found freedom in nonconformity

PRESS

testimony and, for all those whose truths feel yet to be told, a potent spell of recognition.

"I was a bit creatively depressed in the run-up to making this record, because of all the lockdowns and all the cancelled tours after *Summerland* came out," Raven admits. 'But then the guitarists Nick [Polak] and Omar [Iskandr] asked me on writing dates, and they really got me into it. It became a whole different process for me because it was way more intuitive, and a lot of feelings just poured out. I realised it was going to be very personal."

The first song the band wrote was *Hermagorgon*. A play on the words 'hermaphrodite' and 'Gorgon', a snake-haired monster from Greek myth, it was a means not so much to reconcile their past, but to reclaim it, to understand the power they'd been granted.

"When I was born, I was thought of as some kind of monster – that's what they made of me," Raven explains. "And then they tried to fix me. If I was born in some other time or in another country, I would be like a god or something, but, if you think I'm a monster, I'll be your monster rather than living the lie that you forced me in. I'm not Adam, I'm not Eve, I'm the fucking snake in your paradise! Ha ha ha!"

"WHEN I WAS BORN THEY THOUGHT I WAS A MONSTER"

As well as examining themes of gender and identity within Dool, Raven has addressed them in a more public forum as a Dutch TV host, whether as a judge on *Drag Race* or fronting documentaries dealing with those issues. A 2017 documentary series, trying to break the taboo of being in the grey area between defined gender norms, led to a host of heartfelt messages from parents of intersex babies, intersex people themselves and the wider trans community.

"I was aware of the responsibility that I had," says Raven. "I'd never felt heard or represented, but there are probably a lot more little Ravens out there, looking for a feeling of belonging. It was a really moving time, and it still is, because there are a lot of people who feel that I represent something in public that's like them."

For a band with such a personal yet embracing outlook, whose constant, open-ended need to keep evolving has made them a singular identity within the wider metal world, Dool have found a broad, committed community to embrace them back.

"I see people from so many different walks of life coming to the show," says Raven. "There are the occult, black metal-ish people because of our connection to The Devil's Blood, and then there's queer kids who come for my story, and there are old rockers in the back. I think that's a unique thing about Dool, that we have such a diverse audience. People who are looking for something, who are soul-searching, they might end up at a Dool concert. It's all people who don't feel finished… and love some good guitar work! Ha ha ha!"

***THE SHAPE OF FLUIDITY* IS OUT NOW VIA PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS. DOOL WILL PLAY THE ALBUM IN FULL AT ROADBURN FESTIVAL ON APRIL 19**

Dool attract fans from all walks of life… and they wouldn't have it any other way

PRESS

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SCREAM BLOODY GORE

In 1993, iconic videogame *Doom* and its metal-inspired soundtrack changed the world. More than 30 years on, its influence is as huge as ever

WORDS: TOM REGAN

ID, BETHESDA

In January 1993, upstart US game developers id Software put out a press release announcing a game that would revolutionise the world. According to the press release, it was set in a scientific research facility where "wave after wave of demonic creatures are spreading through the base, killing or possessing everyone in sight". Gamers would play one of four off-duty soldiers. "As you stand knee-deep in the dead, you must eradicate the enemy and find out where they're coming from… the safest place is behind a trigger."

The hyperbole didn't stop there. Such was id's confidence in the game, they proclaimed that they "fully expect it to be the number one cause of decreased productivity in businesses around the world". They had a striking name for this soon-to-be released classic: *Doom*. The only problem? Its creators had yet to write a single line of code for it.

Not that the devs at id were worried. They'd already upended the industry the previous year with the anarchic *Wolfenstein 3D*, a dark, blood-soaked, shoot-the-Nazis counterpoint to *Mario* and *Sonic*, with cutting-edge audio that allowed players to feel the impact of every bullet they fired into the bad guys.

That game, like its yet-to-be-written follow-up, had been created by a team that worked and partied together in a small housing complex in Mesquite, Texas. Unlike such corporate counterparts as Electronic Arts, id Software's informal office was more like a university hangout. These four 20-somethings spent their days laughing, coding and blasting metal late into the night as they tinkered with game engines and pushed computer tech to its limits.

John Romero, who co-founded id in 1991, was the lead designer on *Wolfenstein 3D*.

"We were all total metalheads, and that attitude really started coming through," says John, speaking to *Hammer* via Zoom. "There wasn't a game that was that violent, the crazy speed… it was genuinely shocking."

But it was nothing compared to what John and the id team had in mind for *Doom*. Sending players straight into the depths of Hell, the vision for id's gnarly demon-slaying epic was to bring their favourite metal album covers to life.

Hitting shelves and shareware sites in December 1993, *Doom* was an instant phenomenon, matching *Wolfenstein*'s first-month sales in just one day. One-upping *Wolfenstein*'s sense of speed and combining it with a uniquely hellish brand of futurism, it was unlike anything else in videogames.

Bury Tomorrow bassist Davyd Winter-Bates remembers booting up *Doom*'s iconic title screen as a young kid.

"I had to get my uncle to buy it for me," he says. "After *Wolfenstein 3D*, I thought shooters couldn't get any better, but *Doom* really blew me away. The weapons, the soundtrack, the speed… it was just super-, super-cool."

How did id wind up creating the most metal videogame to ever hit the medium? For John Romero, metal wasn't just a soundtrack, it was his life. Moving from the US to England as a computer-loving teenager in 1983, it was here that he fell love with the genre.

"I used to be in the back of the bus going to high school, and they'd have a giant boombox," he says. "I'd crank it all the way up and play Accept until everyone's head was banging!"

He was a budding singer, even trying out for a metal band.

"But it didn't work out because they wanted me to scream," he says. "So I stuck with programming."

Metal's loss was gaming's gain. When John and his id colleagues began working on *Doom*, their only thought was, "This is gonna be the best game in the world." As Pantera blasted out of the id office speakers, something took shape that was darker and more violent than anything ever released before.

Like countless gamers, Bury Tomorrow's Davyd Winter-Bates was blown away by *Doom*

"WE WERE ALL TOTAL METALHEADS AND THAT CAME THROUGH"

DOOM **CREATOR JOHN ROMERO**

Doom felt like it was written in blood. Its giddying speed, unrelenting violence and terror-inducing sense of momentum were an adrenaline-pumping shotgun blast to the face, while its demonic imagery, metal-inspired cover art and scalpel-edged logo was metal brought to (virtual) life. All it needed was a killer soundtrack to match.

"It wasn't ever like, 'Hmm, what kind of music should we use?'" says John. "It was so obvious that it was metal."

The only snag was that id's longtime composer, Bobby Prince, wasn't a metal fan. Instead, he loved jazz. Cue John and the rest of id going full *School Of Rock* and giving him a crash course in the genre.

DEREK BREMNER

"We sat him down and said, 'Right, let's talk about metal,'" says John. "Between us, we had all the bases covered – prog metal, thrash etc. We gave him CDs from Pantera, Slayer – different groups that had certain sounds that would be really cool to translate to MIDI [Musical Instrument Digital Interface]. Alice In Chains, too. Even though that was kind of grunge, Jerry Cantrell was a badass metal guitarist."

This intensive programme of homework paid off. Listen to the still-iconic soundtrack today, and the thrash influence clearly punches through the virtual instruments. The metallic MIDI bleeps and bloops added a mosh-ready feel to the carnage.

"Bobby did a really great job making the music," John says. "Even today when people talk about how metal *Doom* was, they still remember what it was like to hear those songs back in the day and how crazy that was, because you just didn't have anything like that. But today… it's horrible!" he adds with a laugh.

For the young Davyd Winter-Bates, that "horrible" soundtrack changed him forever. "I played *Doom* before I was even properly into metal," he says. "I was listening to all those 8-bit riffs, like, 'This isn't pop music!' I think a lot of my love of real heavy thrash riffs comes from slaying beasts in *Doom*."

As *Doom*'s legend spread, its influence inevitably fed back into the metal world.

"Gwar were nuts about *Doom*!" John Romero recalls excitedly. "It was like, 'Holy crap!' Rammstein played *Doom* all the time, too. *Doom* massively influenced the creation of that group."

One of *Doom*'s most famous fans was Trent Reznor, who became obsessed with the game on tour. Such was his fandom, that the Nine Inch Nails leader would collaborate with id to create the soundtrack to *Doom*'s landmark follow-up, *Quake*. Abandoning its predecessor's apocalyptic hellscape for a more gothic castle-style locale, *Quake* swapped *Doom*'s gore-splattered approach for shuffling undead, oppressive atmospherics and a deeply unsettling brand of supernatural horror.

"I knew when we were making *Quake* that what it needed was disturbing industrial music," John recalls. "We thought, 'What if we had Nine Inch Nails do the soundtrack?' Who didn't love NIN? *The Downward Spiral* was brilliant."

Coincidentally, id and NIN shared an agent, though John and his colleagues didn't know that at the time. One of the company's business guys reached out to the band to see if they would be interested in getting involved.

"They go, 'Holy shit, we play *Doom* all the time!'" says John. "And then Trent comes out to see us."

John recalls that, at the time, he had lingering doubts about whether NIN could pull it off.

"I was like, 'That's fucking cool, but can they do no lyrics? Can they just make an unsettling thing?' Because their sound is great, but it's also very high-energy industrial, can they do something that's not as high energy?"

The finished soundtrack proved they could.

"The Nine Inch Nails soundtrack was so good," says John. "I needed *Quake* to be a deeply unsettling and violent world where you don't feel safe, and they matched exactly that aesthetic."

Quake may have redefined 3D videogames when it was released in 1996, but much like its cast of formidable demons, *Doom* refused to die. A successful sequel, *Doom II: Hell On Earth*, landed in 1994, its code allowing fans to constantly mod new single and multiplayer maps into the game. Two more spin-offs, *Final Doom* and *Doom 64*, arrived in 1996 and 1997 respectively.

One of us: *Doom* creator John Romero at the Milan Games Week in 2016

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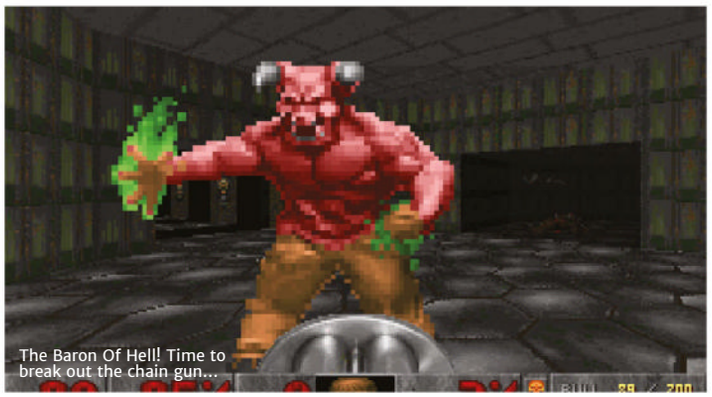
US Senator Orrin Hatch discussing violence in American culture on *Fox News* in 1999

When you see this iconic logo, you know you're in for a good time



The Baron Of Hell! Time to break out the chain gun...

A Zombieman! Pah! Easy! Farewell, reanimated space marine!

Like so much connected with metal culture before it, *Doom* became embroiled in controversy. In 1999, two teenagers, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, shot and killed 12 students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Colorado, before turning their guns on themselves. The media picked up on the killers' love of *Doom*, making it a scapegoat for the shootings alongside Marilyn Manson.

By the mid-2000s, *Doom*'s popularity had finally been superseded by other games. *Doom 3*, a reboot of the original game, was released in 2004, but fans didn't respond well to its slower paced take on survival horror. Yet this brooding behemoth refused to stay buried. In 2016, 12 years after the last instalment, *Doom* emerged roaring once more in the shape of a reboot that reimagined its demonic limb-blasting for a new generation of gamers and metal fans alike.

John Romero was no longer involved with id Software, but the *Doom* reboot enlisted Mick Gordon, an Australian musician and acclaimed videogame composer, to work on a soundtrack that would become as iconic as the original. He was blown away by how the developers working on the new version had nailed the feeling of the original game. Yet the people behind the game had one significant request.

"One of the pre-conditions of working on *Doom* was, believe it or not, no metal. Nothing," he told *PC Gamer* in 2016. "You'd think it'd be the opposite, right? The worry was that it would be corny."

Thankfully, Mick sneakily incorporated more and more guitar into his compositions, morphing an unsettling electronic soundtrack into something with the teeth to match its snarling demons. The end result was a brutal, low-tuned, riff-filled sonic assault – a sophisticated realisation of what *Doom* could have originally sounded like.

The game itself was a hit, shifting two million copies in its first year on sale, and Mick's crushing soundtrack – a mix of industrial, djent and extreme metal – became a success in its own right. He even ended up performing a track from it live at the 2016 Game Awards, backed by drummer Matt Halpern of prog metallers Periphery.

"Mick is obviously immensely talented, and obviously loves Meshuggah, like everyone should," says Periphery guitarist Misha Mansoor, an avid fan of the *Doom* reboot. "I remember hearing that soundtrack and playing that game and just thinking it's so awesome that something like this could happen, because this is not the safe choice. Generally, first-person shooters have heavy electronic elements or dark industrial elements, so players think they're gonna get electro, and then when it hits, it's a metal riff. And that's so cool."

Bury Tomorrow's Davyd Winter-Bates sees Mick Gordon's soundtrack as being just as important to late-2010s metal as the original was to the early-90s scene.

"Yes, it can be a gateway to more people liking metal, but, at the same time, those extra soundscape elements also show us what that genre can do," he says. "The only problem

GETTY, ID, BETHESDA

Doom Eternal's Whiplash. Dispenser of those damn energy waves!

2020's *Doom Eternal* went down a storm

I have with that soundtrack is sometimes the riffs are *too* good, and they distract when you're playing."

And John Romero? The Daddy of *Doom* himself was blown away by the soundtrack. "I love it!" he enthuses. "It was really awesome. Mick Gordon did such a great job."

As with the original *Doom* more than two decades earlier, the reboot's influence bled into the metal world. Misha Mansoor says he saw an upswing in interest in djent and tech metal from people who might not have otherwise encountered it.

"It was a perfect storm, because Mick did a really, really great job with the soundtrack," he says. "People got to experience what metal *could* be, as opposed to this sort of watered-down impression of what someone thinks it is. When someone gets to experience that in earnest, you can have those 'Oh shit!' moments where everything clicks, and it becomes your gateway drug."

Mick Gordon himself has become a go-to collaborator for metal bands. Bring Me The Horizon enlisted him to work on 2020's *Post Human: Survival Horror* album. The composer has also worked with the likes of Architects, Motionless In White and Monuments, while the 2016 iteration of *Doom* and its acclaimed 2020 sequel, *Doom Eternal*, influenced Bury Tomorrow's 2023 album, *The Seventh Sun*.

BETHESDA

"MY LOVE OF THRASH RIFFS COMES FROM SLAYING BEASTS IN *DOOM*"

BURY TOMORROW'S DAVYD WINTER-BATES

"Part of what makes that soundtrack so good is everything that's going on – from the squelching to the shooting, to the reloading to the voiceovers – it all ties in," says Davyd Winter-Bates. "On our last record, we started to do that with things like chains and sirens, weird things that we would just be like, 'Hey, we should put this noise on there!' I really liked the idea of pulling in things that aren't necessarily instrumental into our music. Adding in those things comes from playing games like *Doom*."

John Romero's time working on *Doom* may have come to a close long ago, but his love of the series and for metal has never left him. Now living in Galway, Ireland with wife and fellow game developer Brenda Romero, he still attends as many metal gigs as he can. Recently, he's contributed to Iron Maiden's *Piece Of Mind* comic book, celebrating the band's 1983 album.

Right now, John and his studio, Romero Games, are working on an all-new shooter that's shrouded in secrecy. Whether or not it'll have the same impact as *Doom* remains to be seen, but the legacy of John's blood-soaked art continues to reverberate in the worlds of gaming and metal alike.

NOW TURN OVER FOR OUR DOOM-INSPIRED RUN-DOWN OF THE 20 MOST METAL GAMES EVER

THE 20 MOST METAL VIDEOGAMES EVER

Doom might be the OG metal videogame, but these zombie-infested, car-smashing, Ozzy-featuring classics took things way past 11

WORDS: SERENA CHERRY, RICH HOBSON, MATT MILLS

Twisted Metal: not a game to play the night before your driving test...

TWISTED METAL

Various developers/Sony Computer Entertainment, 1995–2012

Twisted Metal survived three generations of PlayStation thanks to nothing more complicated than vehicular mayhem and a brash metal soundtrack. The elevator pitch for the original entry was basically '*Mortal Kombat* in cars', with players choosing from a gallery of vehicles that would assault each other until a victor emerged. By the time of its 2012 remake, the franchise had amassed a cast of recurring characters (chiefly the beefy clown Sweet Tooth), while the music was so vital that Larry LaLonde of Primus and Buckethead of Guns N' Roses fame composed some songs. There's been no game since, but *Twisted Metal* lives on as a kickass TV show. **MM**

PRESS

Quake: fragging good fun!

QUAKE/QUAKE II

GT Interactive/Activision, 1996/1997

Building on their massive success with *Wolfenstein 3D* and especially *Doom*, iconoclastic US developers id Software's *Quake* series perfected the gameplay mechanics they had laid out previously while adopting an industrial-goth aesthetic that lent their new series its own unique flavour. It didn't hurt that they had Trent Reznor working behind the scenes on a moody instrumental industrial soundtrack that lent the whole thing a hostile, otherworldly feel, even including vocalisations for protagonist Ranger. With a vastly expanded multiplayer mode, *Quake* quickly became the perfect game for nights in with your mates, while its Lovecraftian atmosphere provided plenty of chills in solo play. **RH**

Carmageddon: pedal to the metal for ultraviolence

CARMAGEDDON

Sales Curve Interactive/Interplay Productions, 1997

Effectively the plot of cult 70s sci-fi/horror movie *Death Race 2000* – in which drivers in a transcontinental road race get points for hitting and killing pedestrians – turned into a videogame, the whole point of late-90s smash-'em-up *Carmageddon* was to upset concerned parents and censorship boards alike, with ultraviolent gameplay based around speeding around a track and splattering as many civilians, cows and fellow drivers as you could before the end. Naturally, the game was banned in some territories, and censored in others, replacing pedestrians with zombies or robots – the green/black blood apparently making it all OK. Of course, all of that only served to make *Carmageddon* even more appealing to a generation of rebellious youths, while its rampaging, Fear Factory-boasting soundtrack provided plenty of industrial metal mecha-blastbeats to cause carnage to. **RH**

Castlevania: a game to sink your teeth into

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

Konami, 1997

Often cited by critics as one of the best games of all time, *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* was a sleeper hit in the 90s – starting with poor sales before eventually gathering a huge cult following. The 2D hack'n'slash side-scrolling gameplay saw players exploring Dracula's castle and enjoying a soundtrack that ranged from classical to goth rock to thrash metal. While vampires are a common theme for gothic metal bands like Cradle Of Filth, it was, unsuspectingly, none other than Dragonforce who penned a power metal anthem called *Symphony Of The Night* in tribute to this classic ghoulish game. **SC**

Nightmare Creatures: face your fears!

Devil May Cry: dish out the destruction with Dante

DEVIL MAY CRY

(Capcom, 2001)

Based on Dante Alighieri's 14th-century Italian poem *The Divine Comedy*, *Devil May Cry* shattered the action-adventure game mould in the 00s with its stylish combat system, innovative gameplay and gothic atmosphere. Despite having an industrial metal soundtrack that evoked the likes of Fear Factory, the most metal aspect of the game was arguably its central protagonist, Dante. Our hero's jukebox playlist consisted of nothing but metal, he lived in an office with corpses affixed to the walls via swords, he had an electric guitar that turned into a scythe and shot out bats, and his sword hilt was made of skulls. That is unquestionably some of the most metal shit imaginable. **SC**

NIGHTMARE CREATURES

Activision, 1997

Nightmare Creatures was a single-player survival horror game that invited players to confront their deepest fears in a desperate struggle for survival against the forces of darkness. Hordes of grotesque beasts roamed the streets of Victorian-era London in this classic 90s game about a devil-worshipping cult and their experimental creatures. The low rumbling, possessed growls that the monsters made in this game shared a lot in common with death metal vocals. **SC**

Diablo 2: devilishly brilliant!

DIABLO II

Blizzard Entertainment, 2000

Shove dark fantasy, horror and a local area network connection into a blender and you got the groundbreaking *Diablo II*. Released at the turn of the millennium with online gaming specifically in mind, it saw friends setting up their PCs in the same room to hack'n'slash demons together. While the game's soundtrack was distinctly non-metal, favouring an experimental ambient style, the visuals of *Diablo II*, in particular its huge, maniacally grinning depiction of the Dark Wanderer, wouldn't look out of place on a metal album cover at all. **SC**

PRESS

God Of War: the bigger they are, the harder they fall

GOD OF WAR

Santa Monica/Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2005 onwards

Do we really need to explain this one? *God Of War* is the ultimate hack'n'slash adventure of the PlayStation 2 era, its ability to transform the player into a human-sized antihero taking down skyscraper-high immortals both awe-inspiring and metal as fuck. The sequels only grew in profile, to the point that the series' 2018 reboot was the most lauded game on the PS4. The height of the metalhead appeal, however, came in 2010, when Roadrunner Records released a *God Of War III* soundtrack album with previously unheard songs from Trivium, Killswitch Engage, Opeth, Dream Theater and more. **MM**

Guitar Hero: grab your axe and riff your way to supreme bragging rights

GUITAR HERO

RedOctane, 2005

Guitar Hero was more than just a game – it was a pop culture phenomenon that introduced a generation of kids who might never have otherwise given a passing glance at guitar music into metal and rock fans, and turned a few lucky bands – hi, Dragonforce! – into overnight stars in the process. With specially made guitar 'controllers', players were challenged to tap coloured buttons in time to songs from a soundtrack that featured everyone from Metallica to White Zombie and Danzig, with increasing levels of complexity for seasoned shredders. A series of spin-offs dedicated to Metallica, Aerosmith and Van Halen cemented its iconic status. By *Guitar Hero III*, Metallica even released songs from the then-new *Death Magnetic* to the game as downloadable content, bizarrely offering the best mix of that record you're ever likely to hear. Like all smash-hits, the formula would be milked to death via lesser imitations and spin-offs like *DJ Hero*. No *Guitar Hero* title has surfaced in almost a decade, but the absence only adds to the sense of delirious rock star-adjacent ego that comes from mastering *Through The Fire And Flames* on Insane. **RH**

Saints Row 2: crank it up!

SAINTS ROW 2

Volition/THQ, 2008

For a generation of gamers, *Grand Theft Auto* vs *Saints Row* was a rivalry on par with Metallica vs Megadeth – a debate that goes on to this day. Rockstar's infamously nihilistic car-jacking-and-street-violence *GTA* series would ultimately outlive its competitor, but – even with *GTA IV* boasting a hair metal-heavy throwback soundtrack – it never surpassed *Saints Row 2* for metal musical choices. This sequel's in-vehicle 106.66 radio station showcased a who's-who of the mid-2000s New Wave Of American Heavy Metal scene, including such superstars as Avenged Sevenfold, Lamb Of God, Trivium, Mastodon, Between The Buried And Me and Chimaira. With other titans from Opeth to Deftones also appearing, it's a wonder that players ever wanted to get out of the car. **MM**

PRESS

Brütal Legend: big-name brilliance

BRÜTAL LEGEND

Electronic Arts/Double Fine, 2009

Brütal Legend was so head-over-heels in love with trad metal that it crossed the boundary from nerdy schlock into gleeful brilliance. Enlisting the voice talents of Jack Black and venerable thesp Tim Curry (aka *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*'s Frank-N-Furter), as well as such icons including Ozzy Osbourne, Lemmy and Rob Halford, *Brütal Legend* played out like every classic metal album cover come to life, as roadie Eddie Riggs found himself in a fantasy landscape commanding armies of headbangers, roadies and groupies (it was 2009!) against a demon lord. Campy, comedic and with a massive 107-song soundtrack, *Brütal Legend* remains a cult favourite, with fans still clamouring for a sequel. **RH**

Dark Souls: kiss the real world goodbye

DARK SOULS

FromSoftware, 2011

Chances are high that a musician playing in one of your favourite metal bands has a *Dark Souls* tattoo. With a hardcore reputation for being the absolute least casual game you can play, *Dark Souls* turned the action-RPG world on its head with its gruellingly punishing boss fights and extremely challenging gameplay. The world of *Dark Souls* was bleak, isolating and rich in lore with characters grappling with complex morality. It reached similar dark thematic depths that underground metal bands regularly dive into. Such a harsh gaming environment has inspired bands such as Tomb Mold and Soulmass to create crushingly heavy odes to the game series. **SC**

Skyrim: a behemoth among RPGs

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

Bethesda Softworks, 2011

The RPG that defined a decade and remains one of the most popular games of all time. Selling more than 30 million copies, *Skyrim* has been re-released seven times in the last decade, which is testament to this beloved game's staying power. Similar to how *The Lord Of The Rings* was destined to be married with metal, *Skyrim*'s epic landscapes inspired enough metal bands that there's now an 'Elder Scrolls Metal' genre on Bandcamp. Characters such as the Dragon Cult looked like they could headline Bloodstock in their imposing masks and cloaks, while Alduin – an evil black dragon known as the World Eater – stands as formidable as the most brutal death metal bands. **SC**

Killing Floor 2: no-frills zombie-killing fun

KILLING FLOOR 2

Tripwire Interactive, 2015

Tripwire Interactive kept shit simple with this zombie-annihilating multiplayer first-person shooter sequel. With *Killing Floor 2*, the studio found the unfettered formula for adrenaline and added zero frills. Players descended down 10 'floors' of the undead, each plummet ending with a hellish shootout against a mangled boss. Even more excitingly, the soundtrack was a propulsive mixture of industrial metal and metalcore, with such brutes as Demon Hunter, Impending Doom and Living Sacrifice screaming over the carnage. *KF2* may not have been *The Last Of Us* in terms of grand scenery and nuanced storytelling, but no one could question its incredibly metal credentials. **MM**

JØTUN

Thunder Lotus Games, 2015

From the arena-ready melodeath of Amon Amarth to Scandinavia's snarling black metal scene, Norse myths have long been a cornerstone of metal's iconography. 2015 indie game *Jotun* proved an enjoyable way for metalheads to get more immersed in the stories behind the godly imagery and world-sized snakes. The player took the role of a Viking who, after dying a 'dishonourable' death (i.e., not in battle), had to solve puzzles and defeat towering bosses, thus proving themselves worthy of Valhalla. Gorgeous, respectful and just the right side of challenging, was a gem even by the standards of spotless studio Thunder Lotus. **MM**

Jøtun: Valhalla awaits!

PRESS

Karmaflow: hitting the high notes

KARMAFLOW: THE ROCK OPERA

BaseCamp Games, 2015

Symphonic metal has always been given to high fantasy themes, but *Karmaflow: The Rock Opera* put that idea at its centre. With narration by former Delain vocalist Charlotte Wessels and figures including Dani Filth, Simone Simons and Marc Hudson lending their vocal talents, the plot unfolded to a grandiose metal soundtrack, with the player's actions influencing the tone of the music in-game. A puzzle-platformer, *Karmaflow* saw you explore five gorgeously designed fantasy worlds, solving puzzles to collect the titular karma and influence the world around you for good or ill. **RH**

HOLLOW KNIGHT

Team Cherry, 2017

Don't be fooled by the cute and simplistic sprite on the front cover. *Hollow Knight* was a stylishly bleak, non-linear 2D Metroidvania adventure with a gloomy aesthetic pulled straight from your favourite goth-metal music video. The player controlled the titular hero, who side-scrolled their way through a black-and-grey underground of non-linear passages. Populating these catacombs were brutish bosses contaminated with an 'Infection' that stifled their free will. It was a simple set-up, yet the game proved surprisingly difficult throughout, not to mention gorgeously dark. The only thing it was missing was some Paradise Lost or My Dying Bride on the soundtrack to complete the gloriously miserable atmosphere. **MM**

Hollow Knight: beautiful but bleak

Assassin's Creed Valhalla: Johan Hegg would definitely approve

Dusk: bloody brilliant

DUSK

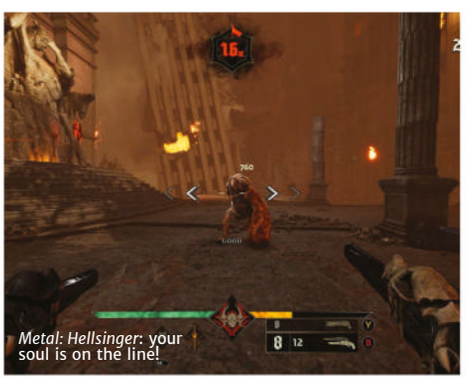
New Blood Interactive, 2018

The cosmic horror of H.P. Lovecraft has inspired metal bands from Metallica to Vale Of Pnath, so it's unsurprising that Lovecraft's hideous cosmology has gripped its tentacle of influence upon FPS horror games too. *Dusk*, a blood-soaked homage to late-'90s corridor shooters, began with the player being meathooked, thus setting a tone of savagery fit for a Cannibal Corpse album cover. The game's soundtrack boasted heavy Gojira-style riffage to get players headbanging while they were shooting monsters. With music written by Andrew Hulshult – the composer behind *Brutal Doom* and *Quake Champions* – *Dusk* merged metal and monsters perfectly in videogame form. **SC**

ASSASSIN'S CREED VALHALLA

Ubisoft, 2020

The 12th major instalment in the hugely popular *Assassin's Creed* series, *Valhalla* invited players to stealthily explore an open world set in 873 CE during the Viking expansions into the British Isles. Like many metal bands, the game drew inspiration from Norse mythology – to the point where every quest name in *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* could easily double as an Amon Amarth songtitle. The game is also linked with dark Nordic folk band Wardruna, with Einar Selvik composing the music. **SC**


Metal: Hellsinger: your soul is on the line!

METAL: HELLSINGER

Funcom, 2022

Take the ultraviolence of *Doom* and set it to a kickass metal soundtrack. It's a simple concept, but one *Metal: Hellsinger* did oh so well, the frantic shoot 'em up employing elements of rhythm-based games as players shoot, slash and generally obliterate the denizens of Hell set to an all-star original soundtrack featuring such A-listers as Matt Heafy, Serj Tankian, Lamb Of God's Randy Blythe, Arch Enemy's Alissa White-Gluz, Tatiana Shmayluk of Jinjer, Dark Tranquillity singer Mikael Stanne and Dennis Lyxzén of Swedish punk livewires Refused. The quest was to reclaim your lost soul from the Devil and fight your way out of damnation, with the songs getting more complex and fleshed out if you blasted to the beat. Most metal game ever? Clue's in the name. **RH**

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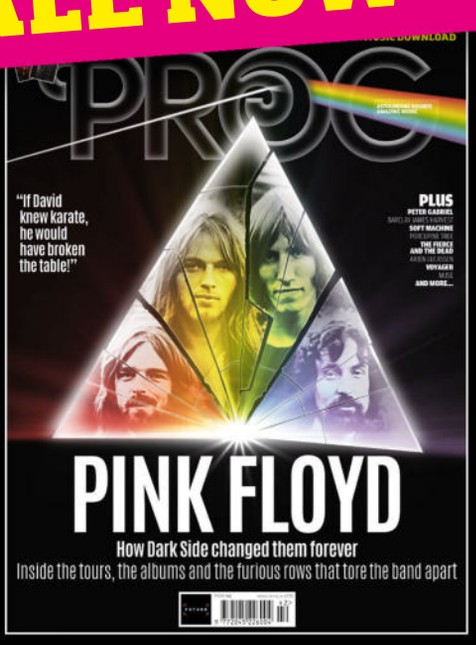

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THE REVIEWS

96 CELESTIAL DARKNESS FESTIVAL

Ihsahn, Tribulation and Primordial fire up the faithful in North London

84 KORPIKLAANI

Finland's folk metal hedonists ramp up the revelry

84 ALBUM REVIEWS
87 DEICIDE
88 DOOL
90 DVNE
91 ERRA
93 HIGH ON FIRE
95 MY DYING BRIDE
96 LIVE REVIEWS
99 THRICE
100 TESSERACT
101 FROZEN SOUL
102 POLARIS

EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: JAKE OWENS

KORPIKLAANI

Rankarumpu

NUCLEAR BLAST

Finland's folk metal boozers stir in a dash of new blood

KORPIKLAANI HAVE LONG blended spirited folk metal with an authenticity that clings to the roots of Finnish folklore and the country's unspoiled nature. Once the go-to band for alcohol-based anthems and impromptu festival conga lines, the drinking content has dimmed over the years, but their tenacity has not. While it could be said that Korpiklaani lack in the ingenuity department, the last couple of albums saw these restless Finns slow down their jam. On 2021's *Jylhä*, their normally brisk jaunt through accordion- and fiddle-flecked landscapes evoking forest scenes and rustic boozers took on a jazzy aspect, plucking sounds from Dream Theater rather than their usual rulebook. Lyrically too, the album deviated from the usual folkloric narrative, with topics including the 1960 Lake Bodom killings. For fans yearning for another *Vodka*, *Jylhä* was a gamble. It's easy to imagine that Korpiklaani don't give a crap about what other people think, but *Rankarumpu* has something to prove.

RANKARUMPU HAS SOMETHING TO PROVE

Fulfilling its billing as a "bit like the old Korpiklaani", the band's 12th studio album has its pedal to the metal from the first chanty strains of opener *Kotomaa*. In quick succession, *Tapa Sen Kun Kerkeet* sees Jonne Järvelä gruffly spitting lyrics atop a flurry of rabid riffs and accordion, and *Aita* is a circle-pit-baiting ditty chock-full of beer-sloshing chants. So far, so Korpiklaani.

In fact, *Rankarumpu* is exactly how you'd hope Korpiklaani to sound in 2024 if your expectations revolve around zippy, accordion-driven tavern metal. The addition of ex-Turisas violinist Olli Vänskä is undoubtedly a coup for this troupe. He displays incredible talent from the off, 'riffing' with accordionist Sami Perttula in only ways that a true master of their craft can muster. The breakneck, guitar-addled *Mettään* is a perfect example of the pair's synergy, while the violin and

PRESS

Korpiklaani: still getting jiggy with it

accordion solos on *No Perkele* show the wealth of tools Korpiklaani have on offer to make their songs shine.

There's a sense of rejuvenation and togetherness on *Rankarumpu*. The title track – a chugging, toe-tapping midpoint to the album – is a "fully conscious tribute to the band". On *Saunaan* – the band's ode to Finland's enduring obsession for steaming oneself in the buff – Jonne, the band's dreadlocked captain, is bolstered by the songwriting and lyrical contribution of the violinist and drummer Samuli Mikkonen respectively. If there's one song that signals that Korpiklaani discovered a niche and stuck with it, it's this one. Soaked in foot-tapping, pub-chanty spirit, it's Korpiklaani at their best.

Reinvigorated by fresh blood and with Jonne back on lyrical duties after many years of handing the baton to renowned Finnish poet Tuomas Keskimäki, *Rankarumpu* is a two-pints-in kind of record, full of energy and backslapping. Careful not to let either the guitars or the folk instruments overwhelm the record, it appropriately balances the two, resulting in a hard-rocking record oozing with character. That said, by track 10, *Rankarumpu* starts to plateau. True, there is something stirring about Olli's mournful strokes that guide *Oraakkelit*'s Rammstein-like gallop, but this penultimate track feels unwieldy, while Jonne's vocals on the ballady outro *Harhainen Höyhen* are delivered with all the finesse of Father Jack. Regardless, *Rankarumpu* is one of Korpiklaani's better latter-day albums that continues their legacy of authentic, Finnish revelry.

FOR FANS OF: Turisas, Trollfest, Finntroll

HOLLY WRIGHT

ALPHA WOLF
Half Living Things
SHARPTONE

Tasmania's metalcore bruisers add sensitivity to their devilry

In 2020, *A Quiet Place To Die* demonstrated this metalcore crew's ability to unleash absolute vitriolic carnage, and *Half Living Things* reignites that flame of antagonistic wrath. Through *Double-Edge Demise*'s maniacal stampede and the goading snarl of nu metalcore standout *Sucks 2 Suck* (featuring Ice-T), Alpha Wolf serve up hardcore fury with a vengeance. However, there is a conscious effort to expand their palette; while snarling sonic assaults are abundant, *Whenever You're Ready* and climactic closer *Ambivalence* float in melodic, echoing soundscapes. This record satisfies a mosh-hungry itch, while capturing a nuanced vulnerability from the typically acrid gang.

FOR FANS OF: Thrown, Emmure, Make Them Suffer

EMILY SWINGLE

AUSTERE
Beneath The Threshold
LUPUS LOUNGE

Expansive overtures from the black/post-black borderlands

This Australian duo's fourth album marks a significant evolution. Tracks like *Faded Ghost* and *Words Unspoken* underscore the distancing from their early depressive black metal roots, embracing a more emotionally expressive direction. It's a welcome shift that keeps pace with the subgenre's increasing orientation towards experimentation and diversity. *Thrall* fuses mournful melodies into walls of distortion and the immersive grandeur of *Cold Cerecloth* crashes like pure revelation. Austere's commitment to their blackened pedigree echoes loudly on *The Sunset Of Life* and *Of Severance*, but overall, this collection heralds a new chapter where tradition and innovation converge in profound harmony.

FOR FANS OF: Alcest, Ulver, Woods Of Desolation

JOE DALY

BENIGHTED
Ekbom
SEASON OF MIST

France's fiendish henchmen get the skin crawling

Ekbom Syndrome – the feeling of having parasites, worms and insects crawling under your skin – is a perfect theme for Benighted's 10th effort. The meticulously crafted callousness makes for a frantic listen, from the maelstrom of opener proper *Scars* through to *Mother Earth, Mother Whore*'s ugly descent, but there's a sinister air throughout that makes *Ekbom* so deliciously macabre. It's also the band's most varied outing. Whether it's the title track's malevolent skulk, *A Reason For Treason*'s nauseating grindcore that swaggers with juvenile pride, or *Flesh Against Flesh*'s myriad jabs, the quartet deliver all manner of surprises and hooks among the stop-start blasts, brutal chugs and Julien Truchan's perverse squeals.

FOR FANS OF: Cattle Decapitation, Aborted, Beneath The Massacre

ADAM BRENNAN

Big | Brave open up yet another new dimension of doom

BIG | BRAVE

A Chaos Of Flowers

THRILL JOCKEY

Canada's avant-doom adventurers go all in on the immersion

'I FELT A funeral in my brain.' With these words, this Canadian experimental trio, who seamlessly blend elements of doom and folk, open their sixth stand-alone full-length. The phrase, uttered delicately and imbued with the innocence of a child by vocalist/guitarist Robin Wattie, is set over the straining, strangulated reverberant tone of a bowed piano. The effect is one of immediate absorption, a quiet minimalist moment that signals to the listener that the next 40 minutes is going to be an intimate yet otherworldly experience by which they will be indelibly marked.

In a sense, this shouldn't be a surprise. Big | Brave have been steadily refining their singular approach to doom and reinvention of tension-release dynamics since their humble beginnings in 2012, exploring an increasingly experimental and singular vision where each album has built upon the last. But with *A Chaos Of Flowers*, the minimalist use of space and moments of near silence add depth and extraordinary emotional heft to the album's expulsions of noise and wailing sonorous feedback – a technique used to exceptional effect on *Theft*.

The contrast between guitarist Mathieu Ball's crashing distorted waves of chords and drummer Tasy Hudson's closely miked, gently brush-stroked drums on *Not Speaking Of The Ways* is the sort of idea that sounds barmy on paper but works unnervingly well in practice. It induces a subtle sense of unease that recalls the unprecedented sonic experimentation that Low adopted on their last two albums, *Double Negative* and *Hey What*.

This is achingly beautiful, haunting music that marks the three-piece out as so much more than just another doom metal act. Where Big | Brave go from here is anyone's guess, but what is clear is that, on *A Chaos Of Flowers*, they've transcended their doom metal origins without betraying them and created something truly astonishing and unique in the process.

FOR FANS OF: Chelsea Wolfe, Low, Sleater-Kinney

REMFRY DEDMAN

CHILD

Shitegeist

SUICIDE

Swedish crust marauders dig their way out of the dirt

Child aren't your average Swedish crust band. They inject a solid dose of Nasum-esque grindcore into the blast-addled *Mass Crowning*, and robust death metal riffing into *Welfare Collapse*. There's an industrial quality to their cover of Pailhead's *I Will Refuse* too, bolstered by rumbling basslines, subtle electronic flourishes and a guest appearance from Refused's David Sandström. The whole thing is delivered in a crisp, punchy production that is perhaps too polished for its own good. This would have hit much harder with an extra coating of filth. *Shitegeist* might not leave a lasting impression, but it's a damn good time while you're in the middle of it.

FOR FANS OF: Skitsystem, Refused, Nasum

KEZ WHELAN

CNTS

Thoughts & Prayers

IPECAC RECORDINGS

LA's impertinent hardcore punks crawl out of the wreckage

Forming in 2018 and featuring ex- and current members of Dead Cross, Qui, Retox, Planet B and Satanic Planet, Los Angeles' CNTS are all slashes of bratty hardcore punk designed to poke and provoke, if not spit in polite society's eye. CNTS have had one member survive cancer and their vocalist lose and then regain *all* vocal capability following a car wreck. Thusly, the 'Don't Give A Flying Fuck' factor is powerful, and can be heard in the inveterate *Smart Mouth* and *Dear Sir*. Still, there's a disappointing marriage of uncouth disorientation and dull rhythmic patterns that whiff big on opportunity, especially when they put the sonic collapse of *Alone* on display as an example of what could have been.

FOR FANS OF: The Jesus Lizard, Big Black, Unsane

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

COFFIN STORM

Arcana Rising

PEACEVILLE

Darkthrone's Fenriz uncovers the doom/thrash overlap

In 2020, two bandmates from mothballed Norwegian doom project Lamented Souls reconvened in their bucolic hometown of Kolbotn to create more epic/trad doom. They ended up with a bunch of tunes that might oxymoronically be classified 'slow thrash': biting, chromatic mid-80s riffs with sinister overtones, apparently born to scamper and ravage, but instead force-fed molasses and confined to a boggy heath. When riffs are this good, why not drag them out a bit? Especially as they've invited along Darkthrone legend Fenriz to do his loony doom warble over the top. Fenriz's clean voice has haphazardly developed since his early experiments in Isengard, but he raises the bar here, sounding stronger, stranger, more expressive and confident on a career-best performance.

FOR FANS OF: Candlemass, Agent Steel, Mercyful Fate

CHRIS CHANTLER

PRESS/BIG | BRAVE

COUCH SLUT
You Could Do It Tonight
BRUTAL PANDA

NYC noise rockers over-regulate their attack

It may come as a shocking realisation, but there's much more to noise rock than just making noise. Groove, heart and soul are requisite parts of the equation, along with distortion and dissonance expectations. Couch Slut's fourth release barely escapes from a quandary caused by too much of one and not enough of the other. Megan Osztrosits certainly knows how to abuse her one-dimensional voicebox in the name of skin-crawling big city tales, while songwriter/drummer Theo Nobel wrangles out a multi-layered assemblage of piercing skrees and skronks. What clips the effectiveness are interludes and 'spoken word' parts that present like screaming podcasts, and Theo's borderline robotic drumming, which makes for a sluggishness counter-productive to the freeform danger a band of this ilk should be attacking with.

FOR FANS OF: Brainbombs, KEN mode, Steel Pole Bath Tub

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

CRANES
Fuse
DADAPHONIC

Portsmouth's beacons for the uncanny unearth their dark past

Cranes have traced an enigmatic course over the years, brushing up alongside numerous familiar genres without ever truly fitting in. Perhaps best remembered for their 90s dreampop and shoegaze-adjacent patch, the band have also made intriguing forays into different ethereal realms. While later releases have seen them exploring artful, shiver-inducing ambience, the clanking, industrial post-punk of *Fuse* represents their earliest, rawest state. Self-recorded in a garage and released on cassette in 1986, things here are sparse and tense. Brittle guitar parts and insistent, repetitious beats wind like wire, while Alison Shaw's lost-child vocals drift through the ever-shrinking gaps. It's possible to identify all sorts of strange lineage: a tender, more listenable take on early Swans, or the Proterozoic germ for restless outliers like Chelsea Wolfe, Anna von Hausswolff and Kristina Esfandiari.

FOR FANS OF: Cocteau Twins, Ut, Anna von Hausswolff

ALEX DELLER

DECEPTION
Daenacteh
MIGHTY MUSIC

Norwegian melodeath mob brings the drama

Deception's fourth album immediately inundates you with aural violence. Staccato strings stab like spears, while guitars grind and drums hit like sledgehammers, all before Sindre Wathne Johnsen's maniacal vocals come gnashing at you from all angles. *Daenacteh*'s high drama can be panic-inducing at times – fitting for a concept album about a woman caring for her family in the midst of a national crisis. The Middle Eastern accents on *King Of Salvation* are sumptuous world-building additions, while *Assailants*' steady ascent to all-out brutality may be the band's strongest work to date. *Daughters Of The Desert* closes the record as a monolith of melodeath mastery. It's 10 minutes of beautiful restraint and ferocious deluges, replete with Hollywood-tier orchestration. Grandiose and epic, ferocious and sublime, Deception's new era pays dividends.

FOR FANS OF: Septicflesh, Rotting Christ, Hypocrisy

JACK TERRY

DISBELIEF
Killing Karma
LISTENABLE

Teutonic death metallers still battling through no-man's land

Described as a "declaration of war to desperation, grief and helplessness", German death metal outfit Disbelief's 11th album sticks a middle finger in the face of adversity. Having been around for more than 30 years, the Hesse quintet haven't exactly become a household name in either their home nation or their scene, and this record is a fair indication of why. It starts strongly enough, with *Reborn* and the title track both imposing slabs of extreme metal that get the blood pumping. But as the album progresses the pace gets familiar, the tracks begin to lose their distinction and even a cover of Killing Joke's *Millennium* fails to stand out from the pack. *Killing Karma* has a track called *Flash Of Inspiration*, but ultimately that proves to be more aspiration than execution.

FOR FANS OF: Obituary, Morbid Angel, Behemoth

ELLIOT LEAVER

Deicide: unsurprisingly, 13 is their lucky number

DEICIDE
Banished By Sin
REIGNING PHOENIX MUSIC

Unholy death metal legends bring out the sulphurous smelling salts

IT'S ODD TO experience head Deicide-er Glen Benton beaking off about rejuvenation, revitalisation and resurrection. Isn't that sort of thing verboten in their blasphemy-spewing universe? But hey, rather him than you-know-who, right? And in the case of the man with the forever-branded forehead, the layoff has been much longer than a piddly three days. Six whole years, to be exact.

Given titles like *Bury The Cross... With Your Christ*, it'd be a sucker's bet to imagine the unholy Deicide taking their collective boot off the throat of organised religion. But with the ups, downs and wavering degrees of interest involved in a 35-year death metal career, the question then becomes: will *Banished By Sin* put a temporary ceasefire on the perpetual spinning of classics like *Legion*, *Once Upon The Cross* and their much celebrated self-titled debut? The answer… a solid "maybe". But probably not. However, that doesn't automatically discount album 13 or condemn it to be filed alongside widely panned stinkers *Insineratehymn* and *In Torment In Hell*.

Solid bangers exist in *From Unknown Heights You Shall Fall* and *Doomed To Die*, both of which are resplendent in being songs Slayer had been struggling to write since the mid-90s. Glen has resurrected the layered death growl/Japanese hardcore scream and many songs make fiery reference to the band's glory days, despite falling just short in consistently challenging their own high watermarks. And even in weaker moments, Taylor Nordberg's song-within-a-song guitar leads steal the spotlight by attaching melody, harmony and songcraft to the inherent brutality.

Christianity isn't going away anytime soon, which means Deicide will be crusading for a long while, even if the weapon isn't as lethal as previous incarnations.

FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Malevolent Creation, Morbid Angel

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

PRESS/DEIDRA KLING

Dool have spread their wings on album three

DOOL
The Shape Of Fluidity
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

The Netherlands' shape-shifting rockers make a stand for non-conformity

RALPH WALDO EMERSON once wrote, "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment." This is the central idea behind the latest outing from Dutch voyagers Dool. Both sonically and thematically, *The Shape Of Fluidity* is a journey of defiance: a relentless pursuit of identity in the face of a society that demands conformity.

Fronted by vocalist Raven van Dorst, whose own experiences transcending gender binaries inform these themes, Dool's latest represents a massive levelling up from 2020's *Summerland*. Here they unspool a deeply affecting journey, using prog, post-metal, doom and other elements to question, to probe and to peer into the heart of the human condition. Revving the guitars up to full force, the album fuses classic metal riffs with the spectral echoes of 80s post-punk on tracks like *Evil In You* and opener *Venus In Flames*. Dool gradually layer pulsating riffs and kaleidoscopic melodies into surging prog tempos on *Self-Dissect* and *Hermagorgon* in a way that threatens to overwhelm, yet somehow coheres into a singular mesmerising vision.

Switching gears, tracks such as *Currents* and the title track brood with a quiet intensity, with Raven's haunting vocals weaving spells of introspection and spiritual immersion. These tracks convey an unmistakable psychedelic dimension, painting cosmic textures with broad strokes of echo and reverb. Closer *The Hand Of Creation* wraps its spectral fingers around the listener, with dark gothic undertones and chilly, mid-tempo riffs that ensnare Raven's impassioned delivery in a dance of light and shadow.

As the world around us shifts and churns in the relentless tide of progress and recession, Dool's latest serves as a beacon, a guiding light through the tumult. In a landscape starved for authenticity, *The Shape Of Fluidity* offers a feast.

FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Tribulation, Royal Thunder

JOE DALY

DIVIDED
Light Will Shine
DUNK!

Post-hardcore debutants blaze an incendiary, emotional path

There's a stark individuality to Divided's brutalising post-hardcore. Their debut album is a heart-on-sleeve exhortation detailing drummer/vocalist Pepijn Vandaele's battles with anxiety, his standout performance brimming with personality. Atop this, the music consistently hits the spot. The off-kilter waltz of opener *Cinder* proves captivating as Pepijn lays his soul bare. *Days Undone (So Long)* changes the tone in sombre and emotive, unpredictably explosive fashion. *Remaining In Limbo* deftly strikes a balance between brazen riffing and off-key melodies, accompanying brutal emotional honesty. Packed with moments that take you pleasantly by surprise, Divided are justifiably taking the Belgian scene by storm.

FOR FANS OF: Converge, Botch, Chat Pile

TOM O'BOYLE

DÖDSRIT
Nocturnal Will
WOLVES OF HADES

Swedish black metallers expand their reach on album four

Sweden's Dödsrit are one of the most evocative atmospheric black metal bands around. While this fourth album contains enough tortured howling and bone-cracking nihilism to satisfy the BM diehards, the band have clearly expanded beyond genre parameters at this point. Opener *Irjala*'s blistering ice-war attack gives way to a meditative dreamscape mid-song, *Nocturnal Fire* trades off black-crust thrashing with soaring epic metal, and bracing instrumental *Utmed Gyllbergens Stig* has all the pomp and grandeur of a chest-thumping power metal band. Taken as a whole, these lengthy, complex tracks create a world of barbarism, breathtaking landscapes, and feral beauty that's easy to get swept away by.

FOR FANS OF: Oathbreaker, Spectral Wound, Dissection

KEN McINTYRE

EXIST
Hijacking The Zeitgeist
PROSTHETIC

US progressive metallers reap the benefits of brevity

Continuing in the psychedelic, progressive death metal style that's been their calling card over three albums, Exist's fourth effort is a lot to take in. Each song is packed with blurring, technical riffs, freeform rhythms and explorative jamming. They earn extra points for getting in and out in a mere seven tracks; *Hijacking The Zeitgeist* is all done and dusted in just 36 minutes, making it surprisingly digestible for such a complicated album. If there is a problem, it's that Exist could really do with a stellar singer. Vocalist/guitarist Max Phelps is fine, but he rarely delivers hooks and patterns as memorable as the music around him. That aside, it's impressive stuff.

FOR FANS OF: Between The Buried And Me, Atheist, Cynic

STEPHEN HILL

PRESS/DAVID FITT

FRIENDS OF HELL
God Damned You To Hell
RISE ABOVE

International doom supergroup reassemble to turn back the clocks

Founded by ex-Electric Wizard bassist turned drummer Tas Danazoglou, Friends Of Hell seemed aptly doomed after their frontman – ex-Reverend Bizarre vocalist Albert Witchfinder – moved on after their promising 2022 debut, followed by their guitarist. After a reshuffle, leaving only Tas and former Sentenced bassist Taneli Jarva from the original line-up, FOH are back, sounding more metal and less doomy. They still proudly wear their influences on their sleeves, and the addition of a NWOBHM vibe and Mystifier's Beelzeebubth on guitar are a real plus. But the real surprise comes from the defiant vocal performance of Per 'Hellbutcher' Gustavsson from Nifelheim, who can finally fulfil his lifelong love affair with classic heavy metal. The album art may be deliberately clichéd, but potent forces are pooled within.

FOR FANS OF: Celtic Frost, Witchfinder General, Venom

OLIVIER BADIN

THE GHOST INSIDE
Searching For Solace
EPITAPH

California's metalcore mainstays ramp up their resilience

The Ghost Inside's sixth studio album bristles with infectious confidence. Their message of resilience is delivered with a familiar mix of metalcore, hardcore and punk rock, but here they've experimented with both more melodic and heavier tracks than 2020's self-titled release. *Death Grip* and *Wrath* enjoy irate roars, chunky guitar work, and massive breakdowns, while *Secret* and *Breathless* brave the gentler side of the spectrum. The resulting whole is cohesive, uplifting, fierce and vulnerable. Nine years since their horrific bus crash, this band have gone through a lot. It's a delight to see them deliver such beautifully honest, brutal, and heartfelt songwriting that's impossible not to sing and scream along to.

FOR FANS OF: The Amity Affliction, Architects, Stick To Your Guns

NIK YOUNG

GHØSTKID
Hollywood Suicide
CENTURY MEDIA

Former Electric Callboy frontman delves back into his dark side

On paper, vocalist Sebastian 'Sushi' Biesler's decision to leave Electric Callboy looks pretty foolish; mere months after his departure, the German metalcore ravers hired new singer Nico Sallach, blew up, and became one of the fastest-rising stars in modern metal. On the other hand, it's clear Sushi was meant to walk a darker path. *Hollywood Suicide*, the second album under his Ghøstkid moniker, merges ragged, industrial guitars with huge stomping hooks. Undoubtedly, it's a well-worn sound; many of these tracks, especially *FSU* and *Heavy Rain*, with their driving cyber beats and horror-splashed atmospherics, could be Motionless In White tracks. More rewarding is closer *Helena Drive*, which leans into full gothic splendour as it lays bare Sushi's struggles to fit into a dysfunctional modern world, over a wall of shimmering, apocalyptic-sounding synths.

FOR FANS OF: Motionless In White, Ice Nine Kills, Bring Me The Horizon

DANNII LEIVERS

HARVESTMAN
Triptych Part One
NEUROT

Dubbed-out explorations from the Neurosis frontman's apothecary

The avowedly unchained flipside to Neurosis frontman Steve Von Till's endlessly fascinating solo career, Harvestman continues to explore the deep, dust-strewn alcoves of his musical identity. If 2017's *Music For Megaliths* was a controlled explosion of spirituality, *Triptych Part One* (of three, clearly) is the uncertain, disorientating comedown: an exercise in freeform ambience, ritualistic repetition and the rapturous, womb-like power of bass. With a spectral debt to Om's psychedelic drift, opener *Psilosynth* weaves a laconic pulse, manipulated feedback, minimal drums and haunted, post-punk guitar together, while a dub version of the same song repeats the trick, taking Von Till's organic dreamscape ever further toward cosmic oblivion. In contrast, *Give Your Heart To The Hawk* is eerie and serene, like Sabbath's *Planet Caravan* repurposed for sensory deprivation. The remaining songs are similarly strange and affecting. We remain lucky to share in the great man's vision.

FOR FANS OF: Lustmord, Om, Sunn O)))

DOM LAWSON

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

BURN DOWN EDEN
Dismal
SEEK & STRIKE

Occupying the crossroads between tech-death and melodeath, Burn Down Eden are as crushing as they are exhilarating on these five songs. Alongside rapid-fire blasts, the Germans also have an understanding of primal, catchy groove.

MATT MILLS

GODETH
The Path Of Destruction
SELF-RELEASED

The Leeds quintet's debut EP is a potent mix of hardcore groove and just the right amount of melody to balance out the belligerence. However, the Gojira worship throughout can get a bit too close for comfort.

ADAM BRENNAN

NORTHLANE
Mirror's Edge
SELF-RELEASED

Taking in the sublime prog-metalcore oasis of *Afterimage* and the glitch-infused *Miasma*, this six-track EP is a multi-textural delight, powered by a technicolour electronic pulse, soaring choruses and venomous growls.

EMILY SWINGLE

OBSIDIAN SUN
Burning Obsidian Sun
EDGED CIRCLE

Obsidian Sun is a side-project from Asagraum vocalist Obscura, which makes the lack of power curious. It's not clear yet where this project will veer off to justify its own existence, and this debut EP feels a bit lethargic.

PERRAN HELYES

SYLVAINE
Eg Er Framand
SEASON OF MIST

A stripped-back deviation from Sylvaine visionary Katherine Shepard's chamber black metal approach, this EP explores Norwegian folk in her own ethereal style, but it's as transcendental as her other work.

REMFRY DEDMAN

THROWING BRICKS & ONTAARD
Oud Zeer
TARTARUS

String-wrought melancholy permeates the caustic heaviness of *Oud Zeer* – a term for unhappy memories one struggles to forget. This Dutch split finds catharsis through camaraderie.

TOM O'BOYLE

Dvne decree that all their peers can pound sand

DVNE
Voidkind
METAL BLADE

Post-metal cosmonauts perfect their sonic universe

IN 2021, AUTEUR extraordinaire Denis Villeneuve transformed *Dune* into a cinematic juggernaut: an instant classic of immaculate effects, world-building and set-pieces. That year's second-best adaptation of Frank Herbert's space-drugs bible was by the Scottish post-metal collective Dvne. Their second album, *Etemen Ænka*, siphoned the desert-strewn, acid-soaked grandeur of the book into a dynamic triumph. And now, by the Kwisatz Haderach, they've excelled themselves again.

With *Voidkind*, Dvne have doubled down on their idiosyncrasies and intricacies, making it nearly as dense as the mythology in Herbert's near-600-page epic. Even if you're an acolyte of *Etemen Ænka*, its follow-up could easily overwhelm at first. The five-piece offer the listener even less space to breathe than they did previously, tightening up their arrhythmic sludge metal bludgeonings while splattering their more meditative passages with avant-garde drumming.

However, like any truly magnificent odyssey, *Voidkind* rewards your patience. There's no groove-backed singalong to immediately cling to (à la last time's *Omega Severer* and *Sì-XIV*), the sugary start to *Plērōma* notwithstanding. Yet, that doesn't undermine the mountain-crumbling impact of when *Reaching For Telos* plummets from layered, dextrous guitars to primal chords and smashing cymbals three minutes in. Nor does it detract from the majesty of *Abode Of The Perfect Soul*'s latter half, which stacks melodic riffing, synths and heroic vocals high enough to reach new galaxies.

Also factoring in how finale *Cobalt Sun Necropolis* weaves through 10 minutes of blunt force and space-age precision, *Voidkind* is a candidate for post-metal album of the decade thus far. Every note's perfectly placed to make this an album that demands re-entry again and again. Between this and *Dune: Part Two*, 2024 is already proving a spotless year for fans of batshit cosmic maximalism.

FOR FANS OF: **Mastodon, The Ocean, High On Fire**

MATT MILLS

HEAVY TEMPLE
Garden Of Heathens
MAGNETIC EYE

Evergreen doom/psych sermons from the fifth dimension

Led by their singer/bassist High Priestess Nighthawk, Heavy Temple's second LP sees the Goatsnake-worshipping trio fortify their doom-based sermons with psych, grunge and a sprinkle of 60s rock'n'roll. Tackling topics ranging from the American Dream to relationship nightmares, *Garden...* marks a distinct growth in songwriting for these purveyors of "fifth-dimensional riffs", and is a heavy and hook-laden joy. The primal, Soundgarden-tinged *Jesus Wept* is a definite highlight, as is the fuzzed-up *Extreme Indifference To Life*, with its soulful, goose-bump-inducing vocals, while the instrumental thrasher *Psychomanteum* ends the album with a bang. Meaty and melodic, *Garden Of Heathens* is bloomin' brilliant.

FOR FANS OF: **Goatsnake, Castle, Royal Thunder**

EDWIN McFEE

LINDY-FAY HELLA & DEI FARNE
Islet
BY NORSE MUSIC

Wardruna vocalist blends the electronic and the otherworldy

The second full-length collab between Wardruna's Lindy-Fay Hella and Dei Farne is a seamless mix of synths and the traditional folk sounds of the nyckelharpa, hurdy-gurdy and harmonium, creating a spellbinding soundscape as inviting as a sparkling blue sea. Lindy-Fay's voice is perhaps the most versatile instrument here, piercing and tremulous as a siren's on dreamy opening *Sintra*, yet croaking and creaking during *Whisper*'s verses in contrast to the upbeat, poppy percussion. While the electronic aspects recall 90s trip hop, the more traditional parts impart a timelessness to an album that captures the essence of solitude, enveloped in warm swathes of beauty with a flicker of unease.

FOR FANS OF: **Wardruna, Björk, Kaelan Mikla**

CATHERINE MORRIS

HIDEOUS DIVINITY
Unextinct
CENTURY MEDIA

Italian death metallers raise more bluster than individual brilliance

As some of the genre's greatest have shown over the past four decades, death metal can take you to epic heights while rearranging your cranium and insides. Having grown in stature and confidence, these Italians' fifth album bristles with ceremony over a dense flurry of clinical brutality. New drummer Edoardo Di Santo does a sterling job alongside bassist Stefano Franceschini and guitarist Enrico Schettino, who craft a cavalcade of riffs and some eerie atmospheres. Yet while all the tracks are impressively put together, aside from the ominous grandeur and immediacy of closers *Mysterium Tremendum* and *Leben Ohne Feuer*, *Unextinct* isn't memorable enough to fully sink your teeth into.

FOR FANS OF: **Nile, Vitriol, Hour Of Penance**

ADAM BRENNAN

PRESS

HORNDAL
Head Hammer Man
PROSTHETIC

Progressive Swedes forge a sludge/psych/post-hardcore union

Horndal have really pushed themselves on their third album, augmenting the *Wolverine Blues*-era Entombed-worship of 2021's *Lake Drinker* with proggy, psychedelic flourishes. Hard rocking cuts like *Calling: Labor* and the anthemic *Fuck The Scabs* are all swaggering grooves and gruff vocals, but with evocative guitar harmonies and reverb-smothered leads adding additional colour. *Famine* pulls creepy Electric Wizard-esque riffs into Horndal's sludgy post-hardcore stew, but it's *The Shining Specter* that provides the biggest surprise, successfully pairing a mournful horn section with the band's pounding riffs. With all these disparate songs united through the tale of rebellious Swedish steelworker Alrik Andersson, this is easily Horndal's most complete and intriguing release yet.

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Trap Them, Lair Of The Minotaur

KEZ WHELAN

INGESTED
The Tide Of Death And Fractured Dreams
METAL BLADE

Mancunian death metal diehards keep upping their game

Seven albums in, Ingested are still brilliantly flying the flag for UK death metal. This being their second album on Metal Blade, and with the high-profile guest slots from Sylosis's Josh Middleton and Mark Hunter from Chimaira, *The Tide...* should see the band get more recognition than ever before. So, it's just as well they've released a banger. Full of satisfying rhythmic pounding, *Expect To Fail* and *Starve The Fire* are two of the year's most irresistible neck-breakers. Yet Ingested are able to batter you with gruesome grinding, as on the crushing *Endless Machine*, and bring some euphoric, symphonic melody to the table on *Numinous*. Immediate and eclectic, *The Tide...* nails plenty of classic and modern death metal thrills in 10 tracks and 45 minutes that fly by.

FOR FANS OF: The Black Dahlia Murder, Job For A Cowboy, Cryptopsy

STEPHEN HILL

KHOLD
Du Dømmes Til Død
SOULSELLER

Oslo's black metal groove-keepers keep pace with a mace

Darkthrone and Satyricon might have moved on from their black'n'roll days, but there remain bands in Norway willing to make a 4/4 groove sound as grim as possible. *Du Dømmes Til Død* is a tight example from Khold, with high-quality production and a particularly guttural vocal delivery. *Myrdynk* opens in a register of pitiless doom, but it's not too long before a more headbanging side takes over. There's a contrast within the rhythm section of the regimented drums slamming away while the bass is a little more slippery, which works surprisingly well, itself evidence of a highly disciplined band. *Skoggangsmann* even appeals to a Kvelertak sensibility of a hoarse-throated refrain that just unlocks a hollering ape within. It's not revolutionary, but it's black-hearted fun.

FOR FANS OF: Darkthrone, Craft, Satyricon

PERRAN HELYES

LORD SPIKEHEART
The Adept
HAEKALU

Duma's industrial metal iconoclast shatters yet more boundaries

As you might expect from one half of electronic metal weirdos Duma, the first solo LP from Lord Spikeheart, aka Kenyan producer/vocalist Martin Kanja, thumbs its nose at heavy metal traditionalism and confounds expectations at every turn. As comfortable with breakbeats as blastbeats, his lordship frantically smashes together sounds, styles and sensibilities in a manner that's both inspired and insane. Gloom-shrouded ambience collides with prog-metal shredding; shrieks and guttural grunts wage war against quicksilver rapping; and industrial stomp fizzles into techno-inspired sound design. But for all its randomness and ingenuity, *The Adept* is also surprisingly coherent. There's method to its madness, and the different parts click effortlessly together, whether they're having a Ministry-gone-Lightning Bolt moment or recall The Body duking it out with JPEGMafia. Fans of Duma – or odd, fractured, boundaryless music in general – will not be disappointed.

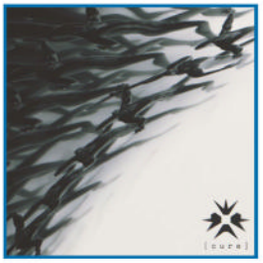
FOR FANS OF: Backxwash, Dälek, Phantomsmasher

ALEX DELLER

As ever, a new Erra album ushers in a new era

ERRA
Cure
UNFD

Metalcore's ever-evolving underdogs reach a higher state



ERRA HAVE LONG been the unsung heroes of metalcore. The Alabama quintet have steadily assembled their solid and multidimensional progressive sound, introducing a new facet of with each album: proggy technicality on 2013's *Augment*, lush and kaleidoscopic soundscapes on 2016's *Drift*, and vibrant melodicism on 2018's *Neon*. Their 2021 self-titled album was a career best that deserved more attention than it got, but it did get them booked onto tours with Bad Omens and Northlane, bringing together inventive guitarwork and gripping choruses – and sixth album *Cure* feels very much like a natural continuation.

The album's eponymous opener sets the tone, recalling Northlane at their best, with spiralling riffs and a bright, bounding chorus. The band collaborated with an external producer, Dan Braunstein, on a full album for the first time, and he's brought the band's arena-sized ambitions to life. It's a space they feel comfortable in throughout the record. *Rumor Of Light* rumbles to life on a thick and gluey groove that nods to Architects' *Doomsday*, while vocalists Jesse Cash and J.T. Cavey trade cleans and growls on the atmospheric chorus of *Blue Reverie*. While this feels very much like a culmination of years of consistent sonic exploration, subtle touches of experimentation litter these songs: see the industrial electronic crunch of *Slow Sour Bleed*, and the crushing Gojira-esque twists and turns of highlight *Crawl Backwards Out Of Heaven*, as the band continue to nudge their sound forward.

Things come to a close with *Wave*, and as a tar-thick groove pushes the album to its climax beneath subtle, gossamer-light synths, it's clear this is the work of a band on the form of their career so far. If there's any justice in the world, *Cure* should be the album that catapults them in front of a much larger audience.

FOR FANS OF: Northlane, Monuments, After The Burial

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

Hamferð prepare to leave you emotionally wrecked

HAMFERÐ

Men Guðs Hond Er Sterk

METAL BLADE

Faroese artisans plunder the depths of sorrow

TWO HUNDRED MILES north of the UK, the Faroe Islands sit amid icy waters, isolated from the rest of the world. With a population of only 54,000, they could be forgiven for not making a substantial contribution to heavy music, but Hamferð (and others) have repeatedly confounded expectations. Their last album, *Támsins Likam*, was a revelation, its distinctive blend of crushing, melodic doom, austere melody and frostbitten atmospherics a powerfully vivid evocation of the windswept Faroese experience. Six years on, *Men Guðs Hond Er Sterk* ('But Strong Is The Hand Of God') digs ever deeper into those harsh realities. It's inspired by the 1915 whaling disaster that unfolded off the shore of the village of Sandvik, as 14 men lost their lives while in pursuit of their seaborn prey. Chillingly, the locals watched the horror unfold from the shoreline. No wonder this beautifully bleak record is so fucking heavy.

Recorded without the use of a click-track, these songs surge and heave with the naturalistic fluidity of the waves. Alternately devastating and serene, Hamferð move as one; from vocalist Jón Aldará's miraculous baritone, to its slow-motion but rapacious wall of guitars, this is doom reimagined as an echo of nature's immense power. At times, the sheer heaviness is overwhelming. From the majestic sweep of opener *Ábær* ('To The Storm'), to the mournful poignancy of the title track, Hamferð are both stirred and consumed by their tragic history.

Most startling of all, *Hvølja* ('Whaleskin') provides a merciless payoff. With a warped, abyssal floe of detuned bass that sounds permanently on the brink of disintegration, it's a sustained and visceral roar of desolate woe that continually threatens to reduce speakers to dust. They don't make metal records like this anywhere else in the world. The curse of the Faroes lives on.

FOR FANS OF: Swallow The Sun, Clouds, Enslaved

DOM LAWSON

LOVE SEX MACHINE

Trve

PELAGIC

Gallic sludge experimentalists tap into our age of anxiety

The eight years since Love Sex Machine's last album, *Asexual Anger*, have brought about fatherhood for some of the members amid an existential situation that seems ever-worsening. Such anxieties stir their asphyxiating sludge, within a post-metal framework. The seething catchiness of *Fucking Snakes* sets the tone from the off, the band striking a balance between heaviness and accessibility. No track exceeds the five-minute mark, all with various catchy refrains. The keening leads of *Trapped For Life* lure you into a false sense of security, as the pummelling undulations of *Canopy* and the initially uplifting harmonies of *Hollywood Story* all serve only to draw you further into their poisonous mire.

FOR FANS OF: Intronaut, Amenra, Sumac

TOM O'BOYLE

MASTIFF

Deprecipice

MNRK HEAVY

Hull's abrasive misery makers carve out a new circle of Hell

Mastiff's fusion of sludge, hardcore and death metal seemed to reach its grotesque apex on 2021's *Leave Me The Ashes Of The Earth*, but *Deprecipice* ups the hardcore influence considerably, resulting in their most abrasive album yet. While their trademark misery lurks just beneath the surface – especially on the skin-crawling interlude *Cut-Throat*, whose sense of impending doom is heightened by brutal vocals from Primitive Man's Ethan Lee McCarthy – there's an even more confrontational atmosphere here. If their last album sounded like it wanted to crawl into a corner and die, *Deprecipice* wants to kill you as swiftly and efficiently as it can.

FOR FANS OF: Primitive Man, Crowbar, Nails

KEZ WHELAN

THE MONOLITH DEATHCULT

The Demon Who Makes Trophies Of Men

HUMAN DETONATOR

Extreme Dutch widescreen bombast for the end of the world

The death metal equivalent of a shit-eating grin, The Monolith Deathcult continue to make a virtue of grotesque pomposity. Their trademark, pulverising madness is still evolving. Everything about these songs is huge and preposterous, sounding like an army of sledgehammer-wielding beasts surfing on machine-driven under-currents. But even taking their no-fucks maximalism into account, *Commanders Encircled With Foes* and *Three-Headed Death Machine* are still impeccable examples of ultra-modern DM with a symphonic twist. On demented centrepiece *Gogmagog – The Bryansk Forest Revisited*, these arch piss-takers torch the titular Russian woodland with such crazed alacrity that level-headed listeners might fear for everyone's sanity. Monolithic, as ever.

FOR FANS OF: Strapping Young Lad, Fleshgod Apocalypse, Ex Deo

DOM LAWSON

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

PENTAGRAM (CHILE)

Eternal Life Of Madness

LISTENABLE

As stuck in the 80s' latter half as they still are, there's a reason why Pentagram (Chile)'s 1987 demo was so influential for the nascent death metal scene. Their second ever proper album is worthy of this legacy.

OLIVIER BADIN

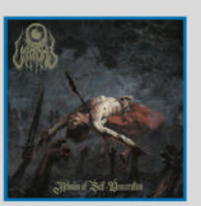
TOMORROW'S RAIN

Ovdan

AOP

Heart-rending death-doom from a band whose singer just had a life-saving heart operation. Here, this Tel Aviv sextet augment their flamboyant, full-force gloom with an array of guest stars.

CHRIS CHANTLER



UTTERTOMB

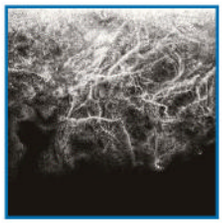
Nebulas Of Self-Desecration

PULVERISED

Subterranean murk and garbage-disposal gutturals combine with an occasional prog-bass flex on this Chilean quartet's debut. It's as convulsive as the discovery of an eyeball floating in your cazuela.

SPENCER GRADY

PRESS/GAUI H.



OFFERNAT
Where Nothing Grows
INDISCIPLINARIAN

Bleak, post-black uprisings from the dark corners of Denmark

Offernat's second outing places a sharp focus on harmonic complexity and a tighter synthesis of doom, sludge and black metal. The monstrous 15-minute opener, *Grief*, melds post-metal riffs with cataclysmic blastbeats and piercing shrieks, building to a volcanic climax. The even longer title track and closer *Funeral Fantasy* further explore this sonic dichotomy, at times summoning echoes of psychedelia and riffs that erupt with 70s hard rock fury. The middle section pauses the aggression with a pair of largely instrumental tracks dominated by spectral atmospherics and minor-chord melancholy, but they distract from the larger ideas in play. Despite this somewhat minor quibble, *Where Nothing Grows* remains a compelling and worthwhile journey through the depths of Offernat's evolving sound.

FOR FANS OF: Karma To Burn, Skeletonwitch, Alkymist

JOE DALY

HENRIK PALM
Nerd Icon
SVART

Ex-In Solitude guitarist returns to rock's hidden byways

After the demise of In Solitude, guitarist Henrik Palm had a brief, troubled stint as one of Ghost's Nameless Ghouls, before launching a solo career in 2017. A core of bittersweet melodic darkness runs through it all, but here the multi-instrumentalist spreads his wings across a wide-open sky, deploying a hauntological time-scoop effect to assemble an album rather as Bill and Ted assembled their history report. Just within *Swim To The Light*, influences are claimed from Alice Cooper, new wave art punks Magazine, German darkwave ensemble Sopor Aeternus and Japanese hardcore crew Gauze. Overall more playful and relaxed than 2020's spiky *Poverty Metal* LP, it's an exploratory journey across an impeccable record collection, but an eccentric, eclectic identity is formed.

FOR FANS OF: Ulver, QOTSA, Unto Others

CHRIS CHANTLER

PERPETUA
Resurgence
SEEK & STRIKE

Scottish groove/deathcore newbies in need of inspiration from within

The ascent of Bleed From Within since their return in 2018 has been astonishing. The Scottish brutes have released three albums in six years, climbing up festival bills and graduating from support tours to headlining. That rising stock is only reaffirmed by new arrivals like their countrymen Perpetua, who clearly idolise the band's groove/death/metalcore fusion. On their debut album, the prospects nestle themselves in BFW's shadow, songs like *Tethered* echoing their collision of heavy rhythms with sharply technical guitars and deep-throated roars. Although it's all capably done, the band never do anything to divorce themselves from the comparison, nor are their hooks quite as powerful. Perpetua have the talent to reach the top, but riding a more established collective's coattails won't lift you to those upper echelons.

FOR FANS OF: Bleed From Within, Lamb Of God, Sylosis

MATT MILLS

SETYØURSAILS
Bad Blood
NAPALM

Rising German metalcore crew find their sweet spot on album three

This Cologne-based metalcore band formed in 2017 and quickly released a set of rough but promising demos. A lot has changed since. They signed to Napalm Records for their second album, *Nightfall*, which featured impressive guest vocalists and production help from Christoph Wieczorek (Annisokay) and Julian Breucker, and revealed a more atmospheric, poppier side. *Bad Blood* picks up the baton with intoxicating builds, fierce breakdowns, electronic beats, and vulnerable layers and lyrics. The songwriting, shared between vocalist Jules Mitch and guitarist André Alves, boasts both more metal-influenced and softer tracks, and the mix of melody and brutality is just right. The title track, featuring Zebrahead's Adrian Estrella, provides the perfect energetic kick-off, *Lately* is sweet and sticky, and *T.F.M.F.* is a wickedly pleasing combination of biting vocals and melodic choruses.

FOR FANS OF: As Everything Unfolds, Beartooth, Venues

NIK YOUNG

High On Fire offer no shelter from their onslaught

HIGH ON FIRE
Cometh The Storm
MNRK HEAVY

Matt Pike's sludge metal juggernaut gets back into gear

THE LAST SIX years has been a rollercoaster for these rifflords. While High On Fire enjoyed some all-time career highs, including releasing their critically acclaimed eighth LP *Electric Messiah* and winning a Grammy for the title track, they've also endured their fair share of lows too. Singer, guitarist and Sleep legend Matt Pike struggled with health problems leading to cancelled tours, while drummer and founding member Des Kensel decided to abandon ship in 2019. Using their recent frustrations as fuel, *Cometh The Storm* sees the sludge icons in defiant form, and it's brimming with bludgeoning riffs that will make your head bang.

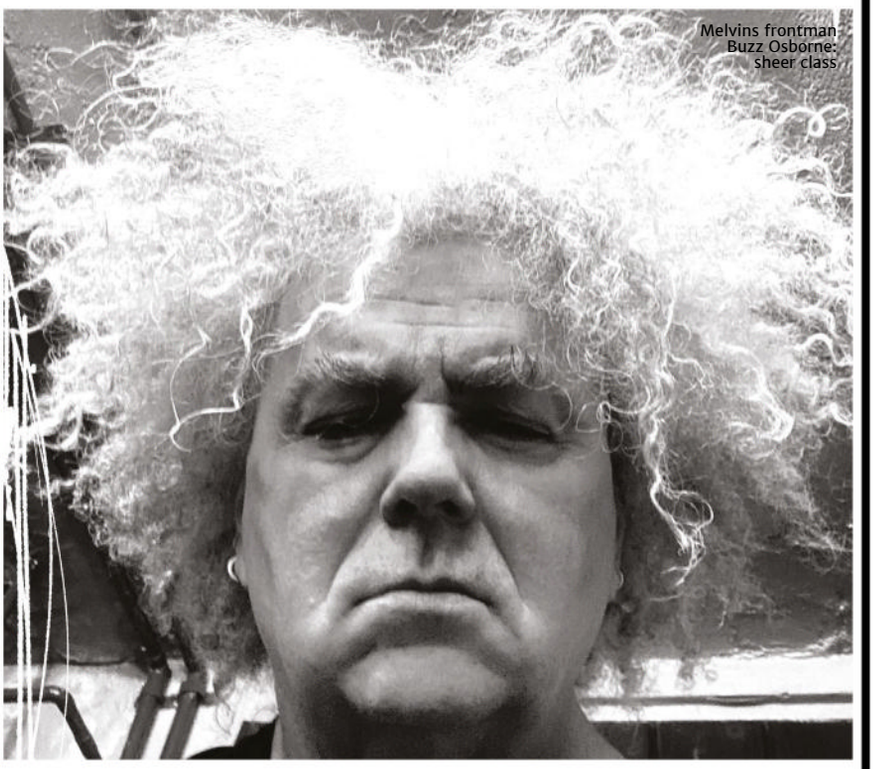
Emboldened by the addition of Big Business/Murder City Devils tub-thumper Coady Willis, the fiercely talented musician makes his presence felt throughout, and helps High On Fire reach new heights – especially on the pummelling, punk-minded *The Beating*. Once more featuring Converge's Kurt Ballou on production duties, *Cometh The Storm* is crammed with plenty of the veterans' trademark, sky-cracking heavy metal thunder, not least on *Tough Guy* and *Lightning Beard*.

These old dogs have also learned some new tricks. Bassist Jeff Matz used his downtime from the group to study the techniques of Middle Eastern folk music and the plucked string instrument the bağlama, and he puts his newfound skills to good use on the Zeppelin-meets-Motörhead opener *Lambsbread*, as well as the hypnotic instrumental *Karanlık Yol*. Their grave-gargling frontman also delivers some vintage performances, and the incendiary chugfest *Burning Down*, NWOBHM-tinged *Trismegistus* and brooding epic *Darker Fleece* all feature some of his most potent riffs. Heavier than a lorry full of anvils, *Cometh The Storm* marks the start of an exciting new era for the Oakland trio, and deserves to earn them even more awards.

FOR FANS OF: Sleep, Big Business, Kylesa

EDWIN McFEE

PRESS



Melvins frontman Buzz Osborne: sheer class

MELVINS
Tarantula Heart
IPECAC RECORDINGS

California's legendary proto-sludge oddballs go crazy for riffs

NORMAL RULES SELDOM apply to Melvins. A psychedelically inclined sludge metal band that emerged when no such thing existed, Buzz Osborne's amorphous mischief-makers have built a career upon the gleeful confounding of expectations. Even at their most commercially forthright, the likes of grunge-adjacent classics *Houdini* and *Stoner Witch* were far too weird to cross over to the mainstream, and we love them for it. But even by their own cock-eyed standards, *Tarantula Heart* is a jaw-dropping mindfuck. Built around wild, percussive jams created by drummers Dale Crover and Roy Mayorga, traditional song-writing has been abandoned for an intuitive approach, and the results are spectacular. Furthermore, the cudgelling riffs that have often informed Melvins' strongest records are back in abundance.

Opener *Pain Equals Funny* expands and devours across 20 languorous minutes, and is a liberated colossus. Buzz's vocals pin shards of melody to a tapestry of interlocking downtempo grooves, amid vast surges of lysergic slurry. Dale and Roy are lost in a fidgety furore of their own making, as dynamic shifts and subversive detours bloom around them. The riffs are uniformly great. Echoes of past glories are discernible, but this is a pointedly evolved take on Melvins' trademark sound, as furiously difficult as that is to pin down.

The remaining five songs may not be quite as radical, but the band's unhinged flair is sustained to the end. *Working The Ditch* is a pugnacious sludge throwback with a gloriously dirty central riff; *She's Got Weird Arms* takes an art-rock hatchet to lurching noise rock, as if Pere Ubu were buried up to their necks in hot, desert sand; *Allergic To Food* is a howling mad eruption of spikiness and spite; and the closing *Smiler* is a punk-metal beat-'em-up, overdosing on ADHD meds. This is the best Melvins album since the 90s. Mad but true.

FOR FANS OF: **Big Business, Mastodon, Dead Cross**

DOM LAWSON

SONS OF ALPHA CENTAURI
Pull
EXILE ON MAINSTREAM

Kent alt rockers renew their bond with former Far frontman

Pull is this UK post-rock band's second collaboration with Jonah Matranga – the renowned voice of Far, New End Original and Gratitude. It's gorgeously melodic, yet sombrely crushing alt metal in a similar vein to 2021's *Push*. Those who adored Far's 1998 early emo classic, *Water & Solutions*, should seek this out immediately, as it's as close as Jonah Matranga has come to the feel of that album since. Although his passionate whisper-to-wail-to-scream makes him this record's MVP, the post-punk bass throb of *Ease*, the title track's Failure-esque alt psych and the Deftones riffing of *Unspeakable Majesty* makes *Pull* a complete package.

FOR FANS OF: **Deftones, Failure, Quicksand**

STEPHEN HILL

USA NAILS
Feel Worse
ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT

London noise rockers soundtrack the monotony of modern life

USA Nails are desperately seeking to wring joy from the repetition of doom-laden news, cookie-cutter TV shows and rife nepotism. These themes inform an album that takes shots at authoritarianism and austerity via abrasive dissonance. *Cathartic Entertainment* kicks off the record with a cacophony about the humiliation metered out by modern reality shows. That energy continues throughout the schoolyard-bully-ribbing title track and counter-culture tirade of *Beautiful Eyes!* Unfortunately, the repetition of life seeps into the music and makes the album feel like one song repeated. The vocal delivery, drum patterns and even the guitar riffs feel familiar quickly, offering little escape from our current malaise.

FOR FANS OF: **Metz, The St. Pierre Snake Invasion, Coilguns**

JACK TERRY

THE VISION BLEAK
Weird Tales
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Bavaria's gothic metallers unveil a vampiric page-turner

The seventh studio album from horror fanatics The Vision Bleak is an ambitious undertaking. Comprising one single song split into 12 'chapters' and named after the pulp magazine that first published Lovecraft's *The Call Of Cthulhu*, *Weird Tales* is laden with spine-tingling synths, crisp, harmonic riffing and ghostly reverberating vocals. The slow, ominous pace of *Chapter III: In Gardens Red, Satanical* is grandiose gothic metal, while *IV: Once I Was A Flower* is a bittersweet vampiric love song on which you can practically hear the blood-red rose petals falling. Listening to *Weird Tales* in one sitting can feel claustrophobic but, for the most part, it's a meticulously well-paced, delightfully esoteric entity.

FOR FANS OF: **Moonspell, Lake Of Tears, Dimmu Borgir**

CATHERINE MORRIS

PRESS/MELVINS

VORGA
Beyond The Palest Star
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

An accommodating, black metal journey to the cosmos

Black metal with big melodies and keyboards has explored the stars as much as it has spooky Transylvanian castles. Vorga make that kind of music for listeners who don't want to piss about with 20 minutes of ambience when buying their ticket for the spaceship. You might not expect black metal about the obscure mysteries of the cosmos to gallop like this does, but *The Cataclysm* thunders, and *Tragic Humanity* summons the most heavy metal parts of BM's second wave in its leads, like Cradle Of Filth enrolled at NASA. The synths have the lightest touch lest you fear this be a cheese-fest, and these Germans' second album has a coldness like the howling expanse of a black hole is outside your window. The result is weirdly accessible and ambitious, yet friendly to newcomers.

FOR FANS OF: Mare Cognitum, Imperialist, Odium

PERRAN HELYES

WHOM GODS DESTROY
Insanium
INSIDEOUT

Elite prog metal squad put the songwriting above the widdle

A team of virtuoso badasses assembled by keyboard wizard Derek Sherinian and shred maven Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal, Whom Gods Destroy can definitely play a bit. *Insanium* is prog metal at its most muscular and technical, but unlike many similar ventures, this band have remembered to write some songs too. Much of the album is dedicated to being as heavy and over-the-top as possible, but the project's melodic instincts almost always win out. *In The Name Of War* is a fearsome, six-minute overture that frequently sounds like all the bombs going off at once. *Over Again* is driven by grinding, Meshuggah-like riffs, while also sounding like a steroidal Uriah Heep. *The Decision* is an opulent showcase for singer Dino Jelusick, with truly mind-bending solos from Derek and Bumblefoot, while *Crucifier* is a precision-tooled redneck stomp. *Insanium* is exhausting but magnificent.

FOR FANS OF: Symphony X, Manticora, Witherfall

DOM LAWSON

WRISTMEETRAZOR
Degeneration
PROSTHETIC

Washington DC's early metalcore revivalists get close to the mark

A vibrant movement within the metalcore scene has sprung up in the few years, with many bands returning to, and building on, the scabrous, chaotic late 90s/early 00s foundations. Washington DC's Wristmeetrazor are one such outfit, presenting a healthy injection of nu metal bounce and skittering electronic beats on their third album. The blistering full-pelt assault that ushers in *Static Reckoning* gives way to an epic melodic chorus that aims for early Killswitch Engage-style grandiosity and hits the board if not the bullseye. Elsewhere, *Culled And Forgotten* is a frenetic reminder that fitting three minutes' worth of ideas into 50 seconds is achievable. Wristmeetrazor aren't the absolute pinnacle of this movement, but if you're looking for a quick fix, *Degeneration* will give you a welcome jolt.

FOR FANS OF: Vein.fm, .gif from god, 156/Silence

REMFRY DEDMAN

ZOMBI
Direct Inject
RELAPSE

Proto-synthwave virtuosos prove they still know the score

Even though Pittsburgh's Zombi have been colliding space rock, prog and brain-eating 70s/80s film scores for 23 years, the public's focus sometimes underestimates just how incredibly multi-dimensional the work of Steve Moore and AE Paterra is. Lest anyone forget, this band are equally comfortable delivering an album of soft rock covers and touring with Daughters as they are worshipping at the altar of 80s must-see-TV and Rush's *Subdivisions*. *Direct Inject* is the culmination of all of the above, as the album swings from the title track's abandoned-shopping-plaza to the sinister metallic burl of *So Mote It Be* and *Sessuale II*'s yacht-club-and-deck-shoe sax'n'synth jam. Everything straddles a line between classy, sassy, eerie and catchy, with the ability to bring together metal and soundtrack nerds who grew up TV and film nerds in the Golden Age.

FOR FANS OF: Melvins, Jan Hammer, Goblin

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

My Dying Bride complete another chapter in the book of doom

MY DYING BRIDE
A Mortal Binding
NUCLEAR BLAST

Gothic metal veterans serve up another reading of dark poetry

NOW WELL INTO their fourth decade, My Dying Bride have produced a remarkably consistent output. Aside from *34.788%... Complete*, which followed Paradise Lost into more experimental waters at the end of the 90s, the gloom lords have worked on steadily defining and refining their core elements. This means that they've never made a bad album, but it can also make them a little predictable.

Their last album, 2020's *The Ghost Of Orion*, was a triumph in the face of adversity. Line-up changes and vocalist Aaron Stainthorpe's family situation – his daughter underwent treatment for cancer, and thankfully recovered – made its very existence a cause for celebration. Musically, *A Mortal Binding* picks up very much where that left off. There's been another change on the drum stool but returning producer Mark Mynett also adds to the sense of continuity.

Her Dominion kicks things off with a stately march and a weighty riff that Shaun MacGowan's violin weaves darkly lustrous lines around. *Thornwyck Hymn* imbues a Lovecraftian theme with melodic siren song, while *The 2nd Of Three Bells* is epically poetic and sees Aaron's dark, velvet vocals depicting *'The angel of the cruellest watch / The bearer of the final bell'*. The singer's Byronic lyrics and rich vocal performance have always been a standout part of MDB's offering, and he sounds ageless here. The croons ache with wearied emotion and the guttural growl still retains its power.

There are plenty of such growls peppered through the album, but the death metal aggression has long been smoothed from the music. This is mostly fine; few bands can compete for sheer atmosphere and elegiac beauty, but there are a few times when the perfectly measured songs could benefit from an injection of dynamic shifts. Even so, this is My Dying Bride doing what they do best and, familiar though it is, there's a lot to like about that.

FANS OF: Swallow The Sun, Katatonia, Paradise Lost

PAUL TRAVERS

PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

CELESTIAL DARKNESS

ISLINGTON ACADEMY / THE UNDERWORLD / ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Ihsahn and Tribulation bring the wonder to London's newest metal fest

FRIDAY

The inaugural Celestial Darkness is the brainchild of the people behind Camden's trve cvlt Cosmic Void festival, and if its brief is more eclectic, the culture of camaraderie is every bit as tangible, even more so when the crowd are unified in thrall to **DORDEDUH**. Forgoing the traditional Romanian instrumentation, the spiritualism that rises up sounds prismatic and newborn, a devoutly invoked cinematic sweep bolstered by Edmond Karban's alternating far-flung and blackened vocals. **EREB ALTOR**'s sense of the epic is more conventional, blending blasts and mid-paced riffs to moderate effect, with Mats' reedy, ICS Vortex-esque vocals putting wind in their sails.

On a more meditative bill **PRIMORDIAL** are the best chance at proper heavy metal rabble-rousing. An hour-long set leaves room for just uptempo songs, and a live spontaneity with little banter gives a real gung-ho drive throughout, brand new title track *How It Ends* a magnificent do-or-die bolstering to the brilliant *As Rome Burns*.

SATURDAY

With Schammasch forced to pull out, **THE INFERNAL SEA** are taking up the cowled, sartorial slack. Draped in not unfamiliar evil priest robes, there's nothing occult or otherworldly about their old-school, black metal attack, but it's a sturdy, celebratory start to the day. There's a gradual magic at work through **ISOLE**'s set, the Swedes transmuting stoicism into something epic, as Daniel Bryntse's careworn yet resounding vocals turn classic metal and doom into a memorial for a bygone age.

CHAPEL OF DISEASE's death metal gone Dire Straits energy is conversely energising. Their dazzling lead guitar freak-outs are pure starlight, and members who look plucked straight from the 70s use those powers to spice up a bit of extremity. **VREID** remain a strange combination of vaguely symphonic black metal and a resolute mid-pace groove that continually cancel each other out. When they return to their roots as Windir for a live debut of *Saknet*, you can hear that potential for

(Dolch) set controls for the far reaches of doom

sonic tension, which they've seemed determined to stamp out ever since.

"We are **AURA NOIR**, the ugliest band in the world. And now we're even getting old!" Extreme metal's most determinedly un-super supergroup, featuring alumni of Mayhem, Immortal and Virus, remain a fuck-ton of fun, their dishevelled black/thrash like being dragged through a hedge during a storm. Now featuring ex-In Solitude brothers Gottfrid and Pelle Åhman, **SATURNALIA TEMPLE**'s oppressive, single-groove doom mesmerism is an overwhelming experience, with breaks reverberating like psychic shockwaves and mantric grooves suggesting Sleep in a world where the sun is blacked out and ravens pick at the dead for eternity. Stumbling into the light afterwards, you half expect your eyeballs to have turned into spinning spirals. **EMPYRIUM**'s UK debut after 30 years is quite the coup. Traversing hinterlands somewhere between Green Carnation and My Dying Bride, their violin-laced solemnity carries a level of self-regard that leads to a lack of dynamics, even if much of the crowd are clearly deeply immersed.

THE SET

IHSAHN

The Promethean Spark
Pilgrimage To Oblivion
Twice Born
Anima Extraneae
My Heart Is Of The North
Stridig Nord
Telemark
Lend Me The Eyes Of Millenia
Until I Too Dissolve
The Distance Between Us
A Taste Of The Ambrosia

SUNDAY

Bristol's **NAUT** haven't got the feral intensity of post-punk's hall of famers, but they're not shrinking violets either, bringing the festival's sparkliest jacket and radiation-glow riffs, and the Underworld's subterranean lair is the ideal environment. The ideal setting for **WOLVENNEST** would be some intergalactic wormhole, but even in the Ballroom the Belgians are a revelation. BM riffing is transmuted into a sound as diaphanous as the aurora borealis, and it's a constantly squirming medium for enraptured chants and a journey across Lovecraftian realms. **ESOTERIC** are equally transporting, albeit to the final throes of existence. Amid their reverb-drenched funeral doom, Greg Chandler's charred, abject howl suggests the universe's last human slowly sinking into quicksand.

TRIBULATION ooze phantasmal power. Guitarist Adam Zaars looks a bit like The Joker gone noir, but with him and Joseph Tholl flanking Johannes Andersson's ghostly melodies, there is the cadaverous appeal of a classic rock band having been reanimated, now befouling those licks and synchronised tricks into the necrotic *Nightbound*.

(DOLCH)'s stately, drone-bourne doom has a touch of the mystic about it, as if M's fever-dream vocals are trying to articulate something just beyond her grasp. Although a far cry from the psychedelic folk of yore, **HEXVESSEL**'s new blackened incarnation remains yoked to their pastoral core. Mat McNerney's yearning vocals have taken on a more ritualistic tone, and for all the avant-garde leanings, there's a spellbound crowd hanging on every word.

If the dazzling array of starfall lights and the Danny Elfman-esque intro feel like a portal to another world, that's fitting for fest headliner **IHSAHN**. The opening set of tracks from his new album are awash in beyond-the-looking-glass adventurism, from the perspective-stretching dynamics of *The Promethean Spark* to *Twice Born*'s pell-mell chase. Ihsahn is a genial host, laying out a singular vision with a multitude of canvasses at his disposal. Those black metal vocals, as if they're being ripped velcro-like from the fabric of reality, charge *Stridig* with a coiled tension, and *Until I Too Dissolve* pays tribute to Dokken while still sounding fixated on a fabulous yonder. An awe-inspiring testament to a festival that embraces extreme metal's expanding horizons.

PERRAN HELYES / JONATHAN SELZER

JAKE OWENS

Ihsahn sweeps Celestial Darkness into strange new worlds

Tribulation lurch into action

Hexvessel undergo a ritual reawakening

Jonne Järvelä: Korpiklaani's lord of the mosh-jig

Sami Perttula provides some hearty bellows

KORPIKLAANI

HEIDEVOLK

FORUM, LONDON

Finland's boozed-up folk metallers replenish the party spirit

YOU KNOW YOU'RE at a folk metal gig when you hear "Raise your horns!" and know that it's not a reference to a hand gesture, but rather a drinking receptacle. This is the order of Jacco Bühnebeest, one of pagan troupe **HEIDEVOLK**'s two singers, before the band launch into *Drink Met de Goden (Walhalla)*. The Dutch mythologists command the stage with ease, and their rousing set is the perfect warm-up for what's to come.

Another tell-tale sign that you're among your fellow ale-lovers and axe-wielders is the familiar sound of an Finnish roadie booming into the mic during sound check, "Heyyy! Yep! Hu!!!" Some people perceive the Finns as stoic, quiet and cerebral. In other words, as a deeply serious people. **KORPIKLAANI** are definitely serious – about music, drinking and writing songs about drinking, that is. Deploying *Happy Little Boozer* early on in the set is a bold move for a Wednesday night – although they call it 'little Saturday' in their homeland, something that should definitely be adopted over here. They're instantly successful in getting everyone moving about in a sort of mosh-jig hybrid; *Beer Beer* and *Vodka* have a similar effect. The sight of singer Jonne Järvelä windmilling his blond dreadlocks about from under his top hat is pure silliness, but what's most apparent tonight is that while they are unmistakeably a party band, Korpiklaani *are* serious musicians, and excellent at what they do.

Since the addition of prodigious ex-Turisas fiddler Olli Vänskä in 2022, the calibre of musicianship in the band has gone up even further. It's thrilling to see the impish anti-guitar hero onstage again, duelling with accordionist Sami Perttula during a ludicrously fun cover of Boney M.'s *Gotta Go Home*. Like Turisas did with *Rasputin*, they've discovered that the disco legends' music translates inexplicably well to folk metal.

Korpiklaani singing in their native tongue doesn't faze the Forum crowd, who embrace the band's Finnishness as much as they do, dancing wildly to their version of traditional song *Ievan Polkka* and blowing off steam like they don't have work in the morning. The combination of being a horn-full of fun and dazzlingly talented musicians makes Korpiklaani a near-perfect example of what folk metal can be.

CATHERINE MORRIS

NOTHING MORE

SiM

O2 INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM

After 25 years of Skindred, you'd think we'd seen everything reggae metal has to offer, but Japan's **SiM** soon disabuse everyone of that notion. "I want to see you bouncing!" commands vocalist MAH, and even before he brings out a baseball bat to whack the stage – for *Baseball Bat*, naturally – his band's irrepressible hyper-activity means a ripple passes through the crowd in real time as everyone realises this band are, in fact, shit hot. Shirtless and shoeless, **NOTHING MORE** frontman Jonny Hawkins looks every inch the rock star pin-up. His magnetism means all eyes are glued to him; when he holds the mic out and the crowd belt out *Let 'Em Burn*, *If It Doesn't Hurt* and *Jenny*, it's like the fans are watching Queen at Wembley. With riffs detonating like depth charges and soulful vocal hooks, you can imagine Nothing More having posters of everyone from RATM to BMTH lining their practice room walls. But while they might not have hit the same heights just yet, as the crowd offer one last joyous outpouring and somebody backflips in the pit to closer *This Is The Time (Ballast)*, it feels like Nothing More's breakout moment is just around the corner.

RICH HOBSON

XENTRIX

TORTURED DEMON

JOINERS ARMS, SOUTHAMPTON

For all its legendary reputation, this earthy Sotonian sweatbox is a frustrating shape. It's perfect for college bands scraping along 50 mates, but a UK thrash event of this stature turns the poky L-shaped backroom into a packed meatgrinder, the less agile OG Xentrix fans squeezing back from **TORTURED DEMON**'s frantic circle-pit carnage into congealing blockades of t-shirted beer guts. Oldham's rising stars garner more devotees every time they come to town, and tonight the reaction to their full-force thrash/metalcore fusion is so euphoric, you might even believe the spiel about Southampton being their favourite crowd. Initially, it seems the warm-up's knackered everyone out; **XENTRIX** open with thrash anthem *No Compromise* to a mystifyingly subdued response. Energy levels do swiftly reintensify – although crowdsurfers don't surf far where the crowd pushes 50. Despite guitarist Kristian Havard's broken wrist (sustained, he insists, saving a child from a polar bear), Preston's finest sons enthusiastically rip through killer 1989 debut *Shattered Existence*, every one of its million riffs dispatched tight and loud, with passion and power. Many of us waited 35 years for this band to play our town, and for 90 minutes, those years fall away.

CHRIS CHANTLER

JAKE OWENS

THRICE

PALM READER

FORUM, LONDON

Alt hardcore heroes return to a cherished classic

YOU'LL RARELY FIND London's Kentish Town Forum as packed as it is this evening – a good chance for a support band to make some new fans, then. **PALM READER** would have been a good fit half a decade ago, but their evolution from their post-hardcore into crushing, expansive post-metal feels like it's a bit much for a crowd here for some early 2000s emo nostalgia. It's a shame they receive such a lukewarm reception, particularly as they've since announced they're splitting up. *A Bird And Its Feathers* and *Inertia* are breathtaking examples of the sonic tension and release Palm Reader excelled at, and they will be missed.

California alt hardcore crew **THRICE** are celebrating the 20th anniversary of their beloved third album, *The Artist In The Ambulance*, although it's actually entering its 21st year at this point. A they plough straight into *Cold Cash And Colder Hearts* and *Under A Killing Moon*, the Forum goes absolutely bananas. It only takes vocalist and guitarist Dustin Kensrue to announce the album title for a roar as loud as a crowd celebrating a last-minute winner in the Champions League final to be bawled back into his face. The singalongs that greet the melodic two-step of *All That's Left* or the fist-swinging stomp of *Paper Tigers* add to the atmosphere massively, and help to accentuate the record's high points.

Some of the album hasn't aged that well, however. In 2024, the likes of the title track and *Stare At The Sun* have dated to sound like any of the standard emo fare that saturated the music scene at the start of the millennium. It says a lot that once Thrice have finished the album, the second half of the set, cherry-picking the best moments from the rest of their career, is far more enjoyable. Noticeably, the band seem far more energised at this point, with the closing three-song encore of the superb *Black Honey* (from 2016's more rock-orientated comeback album *To Be Everywhere Is To Be Nowhere*), and the soaring prog of *Of Dust And Nations* and *The Earth Will Shake* from 2005's *Vheissu* being the evening's clear highlight. Nostalgia can be a powerful drug, but this evening it's more a placebo.

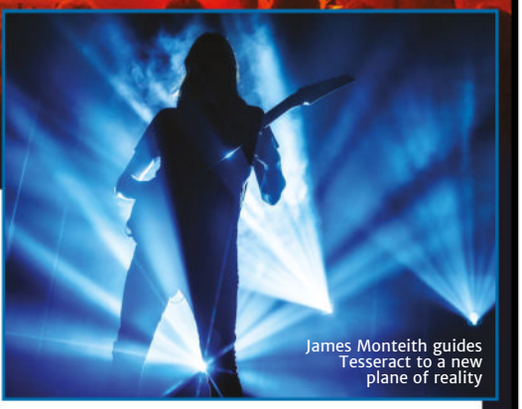
STEPHEN HILL

Palm Reader plot their exit strategy

BEN GIBSON

Thrice: Dustin Kensrue rolls back the years

Tesseract's stage show doubles up as a Jedi armoury



James Monteith guides Tesseract to a new plane of reality

TESSERACT

UNPROCESSED

02 INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM

The UK's progressive metal masters hypnotise the Midlands

WITH NO FEWER than 21 strings between their three guitars, German prog-metallers **UNPROCESSED** deliver a masterful display of polyrhythmic riffs blended with metalcore choruses. There's plenty of technical excellency on show, not least from guitarist and vocalist Manuel Gardner Fernandes, and the room isn't so much allowing themselves to be lost in the moment as diving into it headfirst with reckless abandon. Tracks like *Hell* and *Thrash* are, as you might expect, packed with intricate guitar passages, but they also exude a bounce and tempo that allows for furious pitting – something the quartet are more than happy to encourage. The PA's sound doesn't always sway in their favour, but it doesn't diminish what is otherwise a strong performance.

TESSERACT effortlessly take Birmingham to another plane of reality tonight. For one, their production is stunning – the tube lights that surround the band are classy, feeling futuristic without being gimmicky, and the cold sparks that accompany both main set opener *Natural Disaster* and closer *Juno* just add to the spectacle. Yet, the music is never forced to play second fiddle, which is just as well, because Tesseract have an arsenal of tunes that stand up against any metal band full stop, let alone those on the more progressive end of the spectrum.

Naturally, much of the set is from their recent, excellent *War Of Being* record. They sound monstrous, the highlight being the title track, where the riffs from James Monteith and Acle Kahney carry even more heft than they do on the studio version. Balancing this out are favourites such as *Of Mind – Nocturne* and *King* (the latter of which garners a huge reaction), and an encore of the first two movements in the *Concealing Fate* series, now nearly a decade-and-a-half old and still sounding as fresh as it did at the time. All the while, vocalist Dan Tompkins cuts a captivating figure, moving in a manner that borders on body-popping, in time with his bandmates' guitar melodies and drumbeats. Tesseract are rarely disappointing live as it is, but when they're on the form of their lives like here, they're untouchable.

ELLIOT LEAVER

SHOOTING DAGGERS

ROUGH TRADE EAST, LONDON

Having released their debut album, *Love & Rage*, only a week and a smidge before, it's understandable that London-based multicultural trio Shooting Daggers are still getting to grips with their new material. They bound onto the venue's tiny stage to a massive reception, before celebrating the album's launch by ploughing through it – and a couple of songs from their first EP, *Athames*. This is the first time the majority of the songs have been played live, and for all the band's chaotic performance, the sheer passion, aggression and fire of *Not My Rival* and *Bad Seeds* suggests they should concentrate on keeping that energy rather than trying to tighten up too much. It's rare to find a band who perform their crossover hardcore punk rock with this lack of fucks for form or perfection.

It also helps that *Love & Rage* is an absolutely blinding record, mixing DRI-style thrash riffs, Black Flag's wanton punk destruction, and some instantly catchy, riot grrrl, alt rock melodies that Veruca Salt would be proud of. Shooting Daggers are a beautiful mess in an increasingly sterile and calculated music scene.

STEPHEN HILL

SUICIDE SILENCE

GLOWER

THE DOME, LONDON

After an atmospheric intro, **GLOWER** soon drop all pretences of subtlety and opt instead for a mid-paced bludgeoning of downtuned chugs and guttural howls. It's not big, it's not clever, but it is dumb fun sprinkled with some particularly gurn-inducing slams that see walls of death and flying limbs aplenty. **SUICIDE SILENCE** were once kings of deathcore. Though tragedy and some questionable creative choices have dulled their shine, there's still a loyal contingent of fans turning out to cause mayhem in their pits. They, too, indulge in scene-setting before pulling the rug out, as Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* blares over the PA before they begin their sonic onslaught. *Unanswered* should start with a bang, but a horrendously uneven mix neuters its first half – not that it matters for the mass of bodies flying round the room or everyone screaming back the words. The band frontload their set with some of their oldest heavy-hitters – not surprising given their enduring status in modern deathcore – and it's telling they don't draw on their much-derided self-titled album. No matter the era, though, the fans here have stuck with them through thick and thin, and get rewarded with an evening of brutality and occasional dad jokes.

WILL MARSHALL

KATJA OGRIN

Frozen Soul plough through a killer set

KEVIN NIXON

FROZEN SOUL

CREEPING DEATH

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Texas death metal up-and-comers bring comfort and the cold

AT LONG LAST, the weather is getting warmer and the days are getting longer again, but that's not the type of scenery that Frozen Soul deal in. Dallas–Fort Worth's ice-obsessed death metallers are about to arrive onstage at the Underworld and thrust London back into the throes of winter.

Before that, though, the "warm-up" (ironically enough) comes from fellow Texans **CREEPING DEATH**. The Denton destroyers outdid themselves last year with their incensed second album, *Boundless Domain*, and in the flesh the material is even more pulverising. An already-packed Underworld excitedly swirls and headbangs throughout these 45 minutes, motivated into motion by music that mixes death metal's heaviness with the breakdowns and chugalong riffs of vintage thrash. It's a fusion that clearly has its fans, given that this becomes one of the rare occasions where the support band draws a bigger crowd than the headliners.

While the attendance may thin just a slither for **FROZEN SOUL**, the passion of those who remain stays at a fever pitch. Early in the set, vocalist Chad Green orders everyone to mosh around the column at the centre of the auditorium, and they quickly and gleefully oblige. This quintet's music is deserving of such a vigorous response, too. With their idols including the groove-laden likes of Bolt Thrower and Obituary, they hurl London back to death metal at its most bouncy and primal.

There is some sweetness amid all of that raw aggression, though. In speeches throughout the set, Chad is eager to espouse the benefits of maintaining good mental health – a message that feels especially important and earnest when he reveals that his younger brother, Cory, passed away last year. It's an admirable display of vulnerability in a genre that, historically, has valued brutality and sickening imagery over sensitivity. Also lifting Frozen Soul above and beyond the also-rans is their commitment to their gimmick. The band adore roaring about the cold (their albums are called *Crypt Of Ice* and *Glacial Domination*, after all), and during *Invisible Tormentor* they double down, using a smoke machine to blast flakes of 'snow' throughout the venue.

What this all amounts to is a death metal show that far exceeds the average. Frozen Soul have a theatrical edge, which will likely only grow when they play arenas with Amon Amarth in the US later this year. Just as heartening is that they offer some emotional warmth in between their chilly bludgeonings.

MATT MILLS

Polaris are aiming for metalcore's firmament

Silent Planet opt for the stealth approach

POLARIS

SILENT PLANET / THORNHILL

FORUM, LONDON

Australia's metalcore high-risers fail to bring the dazzle

EVERYTHING IS PRIMED for tonight to be a victorious career apex. Sydney, Australia's Polaris have amassed a sturdy line-up of metalcore up-and-comers for not only their biggest-ever London headline show, but an extravaganza that's sold out. It should be an awe-inspiring springboard to loftier heights – yet it doesn't quite work out that way.

Hailing from down the coast in Melbourne, **THORNHILL** offer a more characterful twist on the metalcore formula than most, polishing it with a lush, Deftones-inspired sheen. Or at least, that's what they do on record. In the Forum, however, a cavernous auditorium and a swampy mix mean the band's more fluttery nuances never get to take off. Ben Maida's drums smash through the soundscape, but frontman Jacob Charlton's charisma and a rapt audience stop the wheels from completely coming off during this 30-minute ride.

Tech-metalcore Californians **SILENT PLANET** also suffer from their idiosyncrasies getting tossed to the wind. On albums like their cult classic of a debut, *The Night God Slept*, this four-piece endow metalcore with lashings of athletic chops, especially via guitarist Mitchell Stark. But again, those details never emerge from tonight's sonic haze. A video backdrop, which plays random images of ruins and amorphous colours, doesn't offer much in terms of pageantry, while the crowd isn't nearly as invested in these Americans as their Aussie peers. What a shame.

POLARIS have ridden a wave of goodwill to reach this, the largest headliner of their career outside of Oceania. Their 2023 album, *Fatalism*, was critically lauded and hit No.1 Down Under upon release in September, just months after fans rallied behind the band following the death of guitarist Ryan Siew, aged 26. Ryan's passing is only acknowledged once here, with vocalist Jamie Hails delivering a motivational speech preceding *Martyr (Waves)*, as the quintet clearly seek to enjoy the occasion of a sold-out show in London.

The crowd are unsurprisingly invested, but there's a lack of spectacle for what's meant to be a special night. Polaris's presentation has barely been upgraded since they opened Alexandra Palace for While She Sleeps last year, with only a couple of lighting tricks backing what could have been a rallying cry for even bigger venues in the near future. It's a shame that what could have been a metalcore ascension for the ages ends up looking (and, with the venue's ongoing mixing issues, sounding) so serviceable.

MATT MILLS

SLIFT

ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

The Electric Ballroom is hot and crammed, yet as soon as Toulousian psych-wizards Slift appear, physical discomforts are replaced by a trance-like state. When their new album's title track, *Ilion*, unfurls its urgent and hypnotic introductory riff, a series of kaleidoscopic patterns unfold onscreen behind them, changing to match the intensity of each following song. The trio forge each note scrupulously, yet to mesmerising effect. The crowd break their transfixed stares for hectic moshing and head-nodding as the band sweep into the riffy smacks of *Ummon*. Through the labyrinthine riffing, Jean Fossat's vocals sound hazily distant, as if calling out from beyond the membrane of another dimension. It's a deeply psychedelic trip – a potent audio-visual hallucinogen, that at times even verges into overwhelming territory, with tracks such as *Lions, Tigers And Bears* and *The Story That Has Never Been Told* growing into intense peaks of complex and euphoric noise. Tonight, Slift make their mark as masterly psychonauts, providing a performance of almost spiritual reverence – something that needs be experienced by psych rock fans and celestial travellers alike.

LIZ SCARLETT

SUFFOCATION

SANGUISUGABOGG / ENTERPRISE EARTH

ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

If anyone's still doubting that death metal is in the midst of a resurgence, a capacity, largely young crowd for one of the scene's earliest ambassadors will put you to rights. Tonight's billing is also a cross-section through different eras, Washington State's **ENTERPRISE EARTH** representing the new breed, where technical riffs and Meshuggah-coattail grooves give way to extended subdrops as frontman Dan Watson gees up an already-packed room. Ohio's **SANGUISUGABOGG** are far more bound to the scene's original aura of murk. Their riffs sound like they're coated in corrosive tar, Devin Swank's vocals come on like the revenge of the compost heap, and if there are occasional glimpses of a hardcore chassis underneath, it's a thrillingly unedifying experience that powers endless circle-pits. Hailing from Long Island, **SUFFOCATION** were always more precisely calibrated than the humidity-induced stupor of their Floridian peers, and tonight is a masterclass in the overwhelming power of imperious, hyper-alert maximalism. A few older fans are baying for more early material, but with Devin joining them for classics *Liege Of Inveracity* and *Infecting The Crypts*, tonight is a uniting of the generations and a sharpening of the senses by the most incisive of scalpels.

JONATHAN SELZER

DEREK BREMNER

POPPY

WARGASM

KOKO, LONDON

Boston's pop-metal futurist spreads the love in London

AN ORDERLY QUEUE in Dr. Martens and New Rocks forms outside KOKO for the final UK date of Poppy's latest tour. It's a following that's diverse, charismatic and oddly kind, as the words "I love your outfit!" are uttered frequently between strangers.

Mosh and circle-pits quickly form as **WARGASM** take to the stage. Opening with heavy-hitter *Fukstar*, they make their way through a setlist that throws out notable early hits such as *Spit.* and *D.R.I.L.D.O.* Also exploring last year's *Venom* album – including rager *Bang Ya Head* – they ramp up the vibes with their notoriously larger-than-life energy.

POPPY's set opens with the distorted sounds of glitchy, dub-heavy electronics, and a wave of flashing bright white lights. Then, from the moment her blurred figure finally appears, she and her backing band launch into *BLOODMONEY*, and from there, into an extra-terrestrial experience.

In a strange but entertaining twist, she uses an AI voiceover to interact with the crowd – "I love you so much" it repeats – before going into Bad Omens collab *V.A.N.* Connecting with thousands while playing a setlist of dreams, Poppy throws out a mixture of killer hits from *I Disagree* to *Scary Mask*. Her ability to make tracks equally as heavy as they are sensational pop anthems is a speciality. Monstrous breakdowns and hellish screams are brought out for *Church Outfit* and *Concrete* – and both songs stand out as big hits of the evening.

Whether she's picking up the bass for *Hard*, slamming on drums for *Anything Like Me* or tapping into her keyboard synthesiser for *Sit / Stay*, throughout the set Poppy continues to remind us of her multifaceted talents. Gracing the audience with rare moments of her own (real voice) dialogue, she asks, "Do you know how to dance?!" for the euphoric *Hysteria*. Even with the usual band set-up behind her, watching her live, you can't help but feel captivated by Poppy's presence onstage.

Crowdsurfers move as one, mouthing back the words "I love you!" to their idol as they pass over the barriers. *Bite Your Teeth* is another highlight, as Poppy chomps into an apple before launching it into the audience. Closing out with the colossal, guttural-infused *Spit* before blowing a kiss to her audience and gracefully exiting the stage, she wraps up the final moments of her bombastic UK tour with a flirtatious bang, emphasising her ability to make metal feel strange and glamorous all at once.

LAVIEA THOMAS

Poppy unleashes a clergical strike

PRESS/GARRETT NICHOLSON

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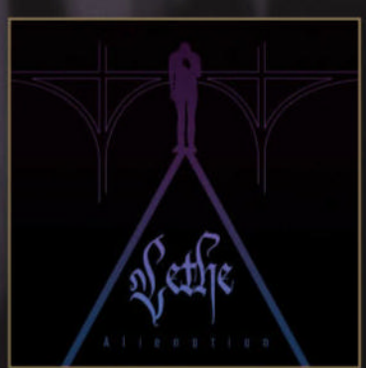
Loaded with the catchy melodies that has become the Alfahanne signature, their 5th album combines a punk attitude, melody and groove with a bleak atmosphere somehow both reminiscent of the 80s and the early days of black metal. On "Vår tid är nu", Alfahanne looks back while leaning forward, staring deep into the abyss. The band quotes "Our time is now, this is the beginning of the end.

OUT 09.02.24!



LETHE
ALIENATION

Anna Murphy (Cellar Darling, ex-Eluveitie) and Tor-Helge Skei (Manes, Manii, etc) are back with the 3rd album with Lethe. "Alienation" is about being outsiders, outcasts, and alienated in various forms, mentally, physically, ideologic(ally) and musically. Expect the unexpected!

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FIVE MINUTES WITH

ALEX TAYLOR MALEVOLENCE

The vocalist spills the tea on arena ambitions, the band's next album – and why they covered Anastacia

WORDS: ALI SHUTLER

In 2022 you did *Pray For Plagues* with Bring Me The Horizon at their Malta Weekender, and in January this year you joined them for *Diamonds Aren't Forever* in Sheffield. How was that?
"I actually asked Oli [Sykes, BMTH vocalist] if I could do it, because I'm a big believer of 'don't ask, don't get' – but I've never been more nervous for a gig in my life. It's crazy having that many eyes on you, but getting onstage at Sheffield Arena has definitely made me want that for our band. I never really saw the type of music we made as 'arena level', but watching Bring Me's growth over the years has made me realise that it's definitely possible. After a dip, the UK metal scene feels like it's in an incredibly strong place right now, and I'm excited to be at the forefront of that."

Malevolence went viral last year for your chaos-inducing live shows. What's the wildest thing you've ever seen at a gig?
"Some of the circle-pits have been pretty crazy. We played Knotfest in Germany and it looked like the entire arena floor was spinning. I felt like Moses parting the Red Sea! But that's the whole reason I'm in a band, to put on a great live show. Inciting as much chaos as possible is always a good time, as long as nobody's getting hurt."

Has anyone ever taken things too far?
"At Bring Me The Horizon's Malta Weekender, we were doing a DJ set and someone decided to do a backflip off one of the speakers. He landed on his knees, and I'm pretty sure he shattered a kneecap because he couldn't stand up. The funniest thing about it was that we weren't even playing a rowdy song – it was N-Dubz!"

It's been two years since you released your third album, *Malicious Intent*. Have you managed to find time to think about new music?
"We're well into the next album! I don't want to say too much, but it's sounding huge and the wait won't be that long. I think it'll easily top what we did on *Malicious Intent*."

"SOMEONE SHATTERED A KNEECAP DURING OUR DJ SET"

Has the success of that record piled on the pressure?
"I never want to stick to a blueprint when it comes to Malevolence – I want to mix things up and keep it as fun as possible. We've never tried to write for anyone else and we're never trying to please anyone but ourselves. Instead of being boxed into a single scene or genre, I want to keep straddling all of them, and this new album feels like another level up."

Have the shows changed since you released *Malicious Intent*?
"Definitely. It was sick coming back after all the lockdown stuff and seeing the growth of the band, but it feels like it's grown even more since then. People who discovered us from last year's Trivium tour and appearances at Download and Bloodstock have been coming out to the headline shows, and that's really inspiring. We're definitely seizing every opportunity and trying to leave a lasting impression. We're not afraid to be that scary band because the energy is always electric."

So, talk to us about your cover of Anastacia's *Left Outside Alone*…
"I have always liked the idea of covering a pop song and *Left Outside Alone* is just a timeless banger, isn't it? When we got the opportunity to do *The Aggression Sessions* [a split release with Thy Art Is Murder and Fit For An Autopsy], I knew we had the chance to do something outside our comfort zone. Once we knew Thy Art Is Murder and Fit For An Autopsy were both doing metal covers [Cannibal Corpse's *Hammer Smashed Face* and At The Gates' *Under A Serpent Sun* respectively], it just made sense for us to be the oddballs. People keep asking us to play it live but I'm not sure we ever will. You might see some more random covers in the future, though…"

You finally teamed up with While She Sleeps for their single *DOWN*. Is there anyone left on your dream collaboration wish list?
"Jamey Jasta from Hatebreed is a big inspiration for me, and I would really love to do something with Randy Blythe from Lamb Of God. I would also really love to try something with someone who comes from outside the world of metal – a real curveball that keeps people on their toes."

***THE AGGRESSION SESSIONS* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. MALEVOLENCE WILL PLAY BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL IN AUGUST**

PRESS

THE UNDERWORLD

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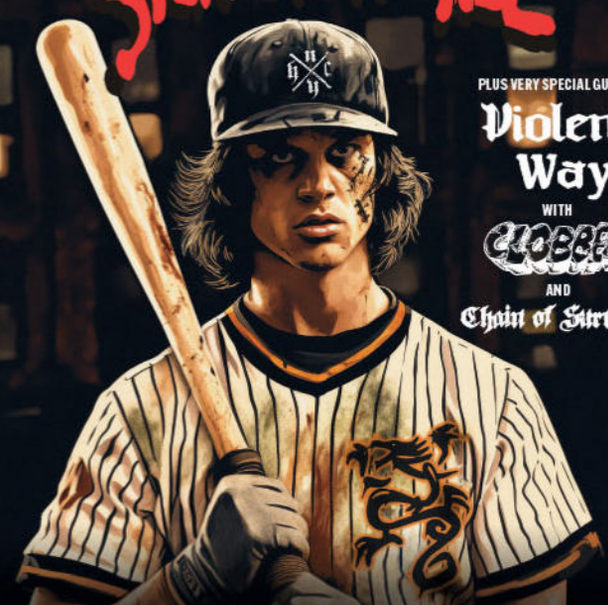

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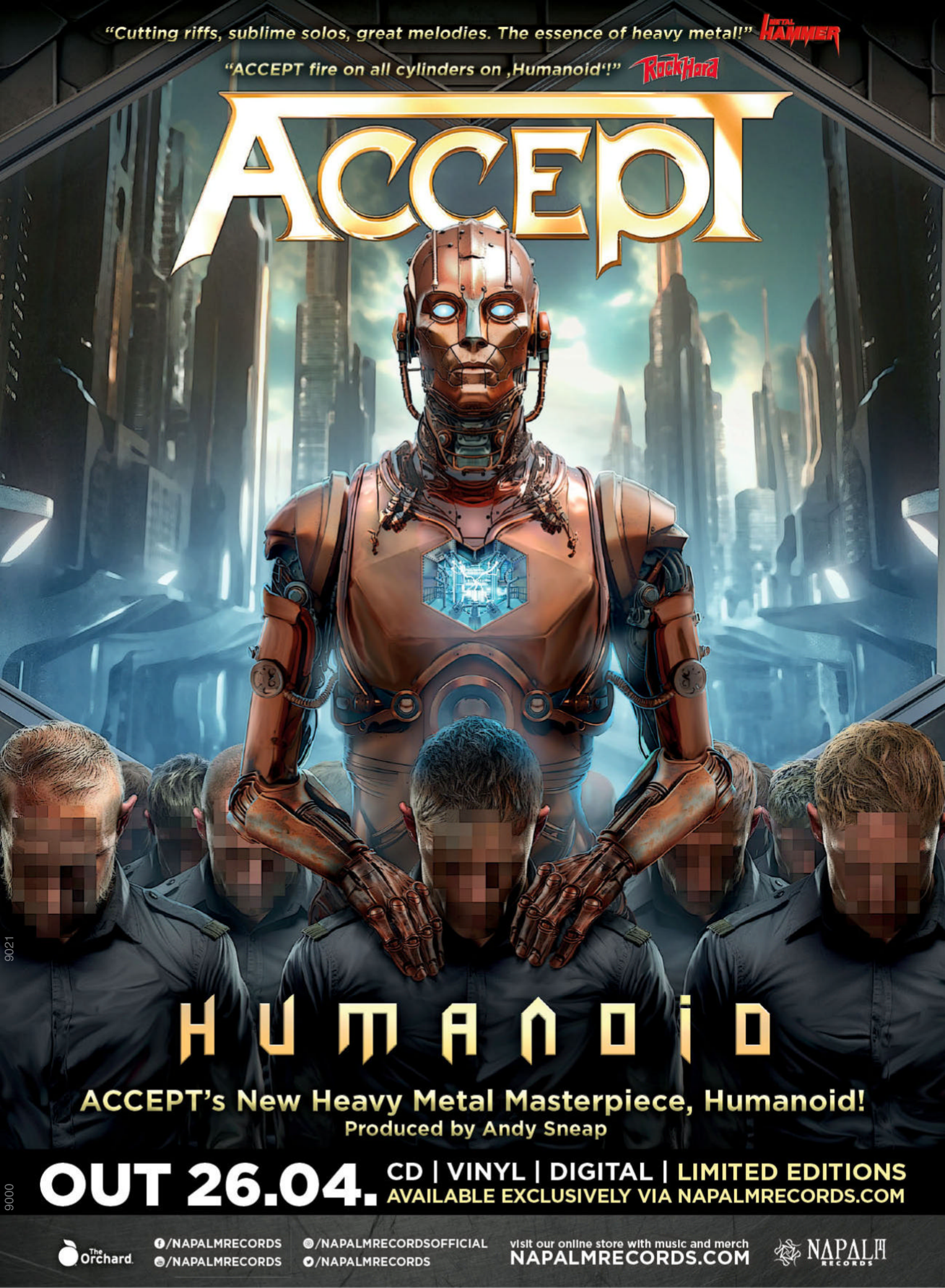
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